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Froddy relating the Serjeant's achievements.

Baron de Worms,
Milton Park.

SAINT JAMES'S;

OR,

THE COURT OF QUEEN ANNE.

An Historical Romance.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.
AUTHOR OF THE MISER'S DAUGHTER; WINDSOR CASTLE;
THE TOWER OF LONDON, ETC.

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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SAINT JAMES'S:

OR,

THE COURT OF QUEEN ANNE.

Book the First

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XIII.

TREATS OF THE SERJEANT'S EARLY BREAKFAST; AND OF THREE DUELS.

An hour before daybreak, on the morning on which his duel with Monsieur Bimbelot was to come off, Serjeant Scales arose, and as he had drunk a good deal of brandy over night, as may have been gathered from the fair Angelica's relation, the first thing he did was to allay his thirst with a huge jug of water; after which, he proceeded to attire himself, singing and whistling the

while, as was his wont, but in a somewhat lower key than usual, for fear of disturbing the house.

Accustomed to shave in the dark, he got through that necessary operation without accident; jumped into a pair of old jack-boots, which had been bestowed upon him by the Duke of Marlborough; threw a belt over his shoulders; experimented the temper of his sword against the floor; thrust it into the scabbard; and having put on his hat and regimental coat, marched with a tread, like that of the ghost of the commandant in Don Juan, to the kitchen, with the intention of preparing himself a cup of coffee before he sallied forth. The fire was blazing cheerily as he entered, and to his surprise, he perceived Mrs. Plumpton, the buxom under-housekeeper, standing beside it.

"My gracious, serjeant!" cried Mrs.

Plumpton, in affected confusion, "who would ha' thought o' seein' you? Why, you're up betimes, indeed."

"You've got the start of me, any how, Mrs. Plumpton," replied Scales. "I'm obliged to go out on duty. But you're not generally up so soon?"

"Not generally, serjeant," she replied; "but I felt a little qualmish, and thinking a dish of chocolate might do me good, I got up to make it, and was just beginnin', when you came in. But, good gracious! only think! why, if I haven't got my nightcap on!"

"Never mind the nightcap, Mrs. Plumpton," rejoined the serjeant; "I'm an old soldier, you know. If you hadn't mentioned it, I shouldn't have found it out. But now I look at it, I declare it's the most becoming cap I ever saw you wear."

"La, serjeant!—but you military men are *so* polite! Wont you take a dish o' chocolate with me before you go out?"

"That I will, and thank you too, Mrs. Plumpton," replied Scales. "I was going to take coffee, but I should prefer chocolate all to nothing."

The chocolate was milled, and set upon the fire, and the buxom housekeeper was about to give it a final frothing up, when, she knew not how it was, but her waist was encircled by the gallant serjeant's arm, and before she could utter even the slightest cry, he had imprinted half a dozen hearty kisses upon her lips. A terrible fellow was the serjeant, and as formidable in love as in war.

While this was going forward, the chocolate boiled over into the fire, and a terrible hissing, sputtering, and smoking ensued,

while at the same moment a sharp, derisive laugh was heard near the door, and looking up, the disconcerted pair beheld Mrs. Tipping.

"So, this is what you get up for so early, Plumpton, eh?" cried the lady's-maid. "Pretty doings, indeed! No wonder you like the serjeant's drumming so much! But my lady shall know of it—that she shall."

"Hadn't you better tell her at the same time how often the serjeant has kissed you, Tipping," replied Mrs. Plumpton, removing the chocolate-pot from the fire. "Our meeting was quite accidental."

"Oh! quite accidental, no doubt," retorted Mrs. Tipping. "As if Mr. Timperley didn't tell you last night that the serjeant was going out at daybreak, and would want some coffee. You got up on purpose to meet him."

"Well, and pray what did *you* get up for?" asked Mrs. Plumpton, sharply.

"To surprise you," replied Mrs. Tipping, "and I *have* surprised you nicely. Oh! serjeant," she added, sinking into a chair, "I didn't expect this of you. To make love to an old fright, like Plumpton!"

"Neither so old, nor so frightful, for that matter," rejoined the under-housekeeper, bridling up. "And the serjeant is too good a judge to think mere youth, if it has nothing else to recommend it, an attraction."

"Ladies," said Scales, "having a great regard for you both, I should like to see peace restored; and having, also, a pressing engagement on hand, you'll excuse my sitting down to breakfast."

So saying, he took a seat, and Mrs. Plumpton poured out a large cup of chocolate for him, while Mrs. Tipping, notwith-

standing her displeasure, proceeded to cut slices of bread and butter, which he disposed of as fast as she could prepare them. Three cups of chocolate swallowed, and half a loaf consumed, the serjeant arose, and wiping his lips, kissed first Mrs. Plumpton, and then Mrs. Tipping, who submitted to the infliction, with a better grace than might have been expected, and quitting the house, passed through the garden, into the Green Park.

It was just getting light, and he saw seated on a bench, in the avenue of trees immediately before him, a stout little personage, in a white coat, striped waistcoat, and velvet cap with a huge neb, whom he had no difficulty in recognising as Proddy.

The serjeant whistled a call, and the coachman instantly arose, and walked towards him. Proddy had a pipe in his

mouth, and a sword under his arm, and strode with unusual dignity. After exchanging salutations, the pair shaped their course in the direction of Hyde Park. The morning was fine, but extremely cold, and the serjeant would have walked forward more briskly, but that he feared to outstrip his companion.

"I think I told you who was to be Bamby's second, didn't I, Proddy?" he observed, at length.

"One John Savage, a French corporal, who was brought over a prisoner with Marshal Tallard," replied the coachman.

"Sauvageon, not John Savage," rejoined Scales. "A brave fellow he is, too. I should esteem it a greater honour to cross swords with him than with poor little Bamby."

"I tell you what, serjeant," said Proddy,

"I've been thinkin' the matter over. I shan't like to stand idle, and if he has no objection, I'll take a turn with Savagejohn myself."

"Why, zounds, Proddy," cried Scales, "he'll be through you in less than no time! He's perfect master of the sword, and earns his livelihood as a fencing-master."

"I don't mind that, serjeant," said Proddy. "An Englishman is always a match for a Frenchman."

"Why, yes," replied Scales, "provided —but I'd advise you to leave the honour of your country to me."

"No, I'm resolved to fight," said Proddy. "I've brought my sword for that purpose."

"Well, if that's your humour, I'm not the man to hinder you," said Scales; "but take care of yourself, that's all. I'll help you if I can."

Whereupon he began to hum "Lillebullero," caroling forth the following snatch, with lusty lungs:—

"Hero, hero, sing the brave hero,
Victor of Blenheim and Ramilies' plains!
Marlbro' the glorious, ever victorious,
Sing him, ye Britons, in rapturous strains!"

"We're both heroes ourselves, serjeant,' said Proddy, proudly. "We're goin' to fight the Mounseers, and I feel as you might have done before the battle of Blenheim."

"You're a brave little fellow, Proddy," replied Scales, clapping him on the shoulder, "and I honour you for your spirit; but you can't tell how a soldier feels before going to battle, especially when he has to fight the French. Why, on the morning of that battle, I felt like a war-horse reined in, champing and churning against the bit." And he again began to sing:—

"On the thirteenth day of August, seventeen hundred years and four,
Was a famous battle fought on the Danube's rugged shore;
Never since the Gallic legions to black Edward's might did yield,
Has their pride so low been humbled as on Blenheim's well-fought field."

"If you go on in this way, serjeant, I shall long to engage both these mounseers," said Proddy. "I'm sure my real wocation is war. I should prefer the cartouche-box to the coach-box."

"Good!" exclaimed Scales, laughing. "Body-o-me! Proddy, how well we played our parts last night, and how completely we obfuscated that traitor, Greg! What a villain the fellow must be to betray his country to its enemies! He deserves to be rammed into one of the great guns at Dover Castle, and blown across the Channel to Calais. But, thank Heaven, he'll meet his

desert! I hope they'll be able to touch his master, Mr. Harley."

"I never meddle with state matters when I can help it, serjeant," replied Proddy, whose terrors of the preceding day were somewhat revived by the remark. "I shall be glad when Greg's hanged out of the way."

The serjeant concurring in this wish, they once more marched forward in silence.

Soon afterwards they entered Hyde Park, the gates of which were just opened; and, striking off in the direction of Kensington Gardens, kept on the higher ground, till they reached the head of a long glade bordered by a natural avenue of fine trees, chiefly elms, and sweeping down to the edge of the broad and beautiful sheet of water, which has since received the appellation of the Serpentine,—for the very excellent

reason that it is as straight as a canal. Broken into lovely little dells, and shaded by clumps of timber, the ground had a secluded appearance very fitting to their purpose. About half-way down the avenue were two springs, celebrated for their virtues, to which even in those days, when hydropathy had not commenced as a practice, numbers used to resort to drink and wash, and which were protected by wooden frames. At a later period, the waters of Saint Anne's Well—for such is the designation of the chief spring—used to be dispensed by an ancient dame, who sat beside it with a small table and glasses; while persons afflicted with ophthalmia found relief by bathing the eyes in the sister fountain. A pump now occupies the spot, but the waters are supposed to have lost none of their efficacy. Is it not strange that in these water-

drinking times the wells of Hampstead, Kilburn, and Bagnigge, should not again come into vogue?

The sun had just risen, and his beams glanced through the branches of the tall and spreading trees, sparkled upon the surface of the distant water, which glistened like silver, and shone with diamond lustre on the dewy sod. Well may we be proud of Hyde Park, for no capital but our own can boast aught like it. The sylvan and sequestered character of the scene was wholly undisturbed, and but for the actual knowledge of the fact, no one would have dreamed that the metropolis was within a mile's distance. Screened by the trees, the mighty city was completely hidden from view, while on the Kensington road, visible through the glade which looked towards the south-west, not a house was to be seen. To add to the

secluded character of the place, a herd of noble red-deer were couching beneath an oak, that crowned a gentle acclivity on the right, and a flock of rooks were cawing loudly on the summits of the high trees near Kensington Gardens.

"Well, we're first in the field at all events, Proddy," said Scales, halting. "This is the place of rendezvous."

"I'm glad of it," replied the coachman, taking off his wig and cap, and mopping up the moisture that was streaming down his puffy cheeks; "you walked a little too fast for me."

"Why didn't you say so?" rejoined the serjeant. "But we're not much too soon, for here they come."

Hastily replacing his wig and cap, Proddy turned to regard the new comers. Little Monsieur Bimbelot appeared to be dressed

with extraordinary care, and wore a velvet coat, a brocade waistcoat, and a full, flowing peruke. He was attended by a middle-aged man, almost as tall as the serjeant himself, with a weasen, hatchet face, a tremendously long, hooked nose, a sharp chin, and a beard as blue as that of the great Wife-Killer of the fairy tale, which, together with his nose, formed what is vulgarly termed a pair of nut-crackers. Then he had a long, scraggy neck, with the pomum Adami largely developed, black, bristling brows, and great, staring black eyes, that shot forth terrible glances. He was wrapped in a loose white regimental coat, from beneath which the point of a sword, and a pair of brown leathern gaiters appeared. His hat was cocked very fiercely, and his wig was terminated by an immense queue. Altogether, the appearance of the

corporal seemed to justify the opinion pronounced by Scales as to his prowess.

Drawing himself up to his full height, the serjeant awaited the advance of his opponent, while Proddy emulated his example, and by way of giving himself additional altitude, sprang upon an anthillock, and stood on tiptoe as long as he could.

"Messieurs," said Bimbelot, tripping nimbly forward, and taking off his hat, "j'ai l'honneur de vous presenter mon ami, Achille de L'Epée Sauvageon, feu Caporal à sa majesté Louis le Grand, mais à present prisonnier de la guerre en Angleterre."

"What does all that mean?" cried Proddy.

"Silence!" said Scales, sternly. "Corporal, your servant," he added, taking off his hat to Sauvageon.

"Le votre, monsieur le sergent," replied the other, returning the salute.

"And now, gentlemen, to business," cried Scales. "I'll be ready for you in a twinkling, Bamby," he added, taking off his coat.

"I sall not detain you long, sergent," replied Bimbelot, likewise divesting himself of his upper garment.

The corporal then advanced to his principal, and delivered him his sword, adding a few words in an under-tone, during which Proddy addressed Scales.

"I say, serjeant, if you wont tell Savage-john I want to fight him, I'll do it myself," he said.

"You had better not," replied Scales. "At all events not till I've done."

"But I don't like to wait," rejoined the valorous coachman. "I say, Corporal

Achilles Savagejohn," he added, in a loud voice, "since our friends are goin' to set to, we may as well have a bout together as stand idle."

"Avec beaucoup de plaisir, mon gros tonneau," replied the corporal, grinning.

"What does he say?" asked Proddy.

"Mocks you, that's all," replied Scales.

"Does he!" cried Proddy, furiously. "Odsbodikins! I'll make him laugh on the wrong side of his ugly mouth. Mocks me — ha! Hark'ee, you spindle-shanked, black-muzzled Colossus—you half-starved may-pole, who look as if you had fed all your days upon nothing but frogs and cheese-parings—draw and defend yourself, I say, or I'll slit your scraggy weasand for you. Do you understand that?"

"Parfaitement, monsieur," replied the corporal, his teeth chattering with rage.

"You are too full of good liquor, mon petit brave. If I don't spill some of your claret, may I never wield sword again."

"Since you needs must fight, Proddy," said the serjeant, in a low tone to him, "mind what I say. As your adversary is much taller than you, come to half sword as soon as you can."

"Half sword!" exclaimed Proddy. "What's that? I've got a whole sword, and a good long one, too. Look at it."

"Why, zounds and the devil!" exclaimed Scales. "Are you going to fight without any knowledge of the art of fence?"

"To be sure I am," replied Proddy.

"You'll be killed, as sure as a gun. However, since there's no help for it, get as near the corporal as you can, and when he thrusts at you, don't attempt to parry—you understand that—but thrust again,

and ten to one but you may hit him. It will be *contre-tente*, as he would say, but no matter, if you succeed. It's your only chance."

"I'll do it," replied Proddy, resolutely.

The serjeant then stepped aside a few paces, to select an open spot, and was followed by Bimbelot. They were about to take up a position, when the polite valet, remarking Scales' equipments, said, "Mais ces bottes, sergent? Wont you take dem off? You'll find dem ver inconvenient."

"Not in the least, Bamby, I'm obliged to you," replied Scales. "These boots once belonged to the Duke of Marlborough," he added, proudly; "I always wear them upon great occasions like the present."

"Ah—yes—I understand," replied Bimbelot, flattered by the implied compliment. "As you please den. Commencons."

Swords were then drawn, appeals beaten, salutes made, and both stood upon guard; but before beginning the assault, the serjeant could not help glancing in the direction of Proddy, for whose safety he felt much uneasiness. He saw the poor coachman standing opposite his fierce antagonist, who now looked doubly formidable, and putting himself in guard in tierce, in imitation of the others whom he had watched, while with his left hand he was trying to take off his cap gracefully. All this Scales saw at a glance, and he then turned his attention to his own opponent, who made a thrust at him in carte, which he instantly parried, with a reposte in seconde. Though anxious on Proddy's account to terminate the fight as speedily as possible, Scales found it no such easy matter, for Bimbelot was a very skilful fencer, and pass after pass was ex-

changed without any decided advantage being obtained. At last, as the valet made a thrust in carte, Scales parried quickly in prime, and immediately passing his right arm swiftly over the forte of his adversary's blade, and presenting his own point at the same time, disarmed him.

Without bestowing further thought on his discomfited adversary, whom he left in an attitude of ludicrous despair, the serjeant dashed with a sword in either hand, to the assistance of Proddy. He was just in time. Vainly had the valiant coachman essayed to make a thrust at his skilful opponent, and he had only avoided the other's desperate lounges by springing back whenever a pass was made at him. Vainly, also, had the corporal, as he pushed him on, called upon him, with furious oaths, to confess himself vanquished. Proddy would not yield, and

though much longer defence seemed hopeless, he still held out. Thrust after thrust did the corporal make at him, and leap after leap did he give, when just as his adversary's blade was within an inch of his breast, and he winced at the idea of feeling its horrid point in his flesh, he heard the cheering voice of the serjeant. Upon this, he gave a convulsive spring backwards, and in the effort fell, while the sword flew out of his hands to a couple of yards distance.

Seeing this, Scales hurried forward as quickly as his heavy jack-boots would allow, and before the corporal could improve his advantage, dashed between him and his prostrate foe. Sauvageon, with a loud oath, made a thrust at him; but the serjeant parried in prime, and beating the feeble of his adversary's blade smartly and strongly with the forte of his own, sent the sword whizzing aloft.

"Ah! sacre bleu! dat I should be beat in dis way," cried Sauvageon, grinning with rage.

"Pick up your sword again, if you are dissatisfied, corporal," said Scales, magnanimously, "and we'll have another bout."

"Ah, non, vous êtes le diable, sergent," replied the corporal; "but you must admit dat I fairly conquer de little cosheman."

"It's false, Savagejohn!" cried Proddy, who by this time had got upon his feet, and regained possession of his sword. "I've never yielded, and never meant to yield. If you say that I did, I'll run you through the body."

As he spoke, he ran at the unarmed Frenchman, who seeing him advance in this truculent fashion, with slaughter painted in his countenance, was fain to take to his heels and fly. In vain Scales, who could

scarcely speak for laughing, called him back. Heedless of his shouts, Proddy pursued the flying corporal with a velocity which the desire of vengeance alone could inspire, and which was wonderful in a person of his bulk, and contrived to prick him twice or thrice with the point of his sword behind, when his foot catching in the root of a tree, he was once more stretched upon the ground. Still, though he fell, the corporal continued his flight, and fancying his blood-thirsty foe at his heels, ran blindly and furiously on, till coming in contact with the wooden framework round Saint Anne's well, which he had not remarked in his haste, he was precipitated head foremost into the water.

Meanwhile, the victorious serjeant, having sheathed his sword, beckoned Bimbelot to him, and complimenting him upon his con-

duct in the affair, they shook hands very cordially. A few minutes afterwards, Proddy joined them, but was unable to speak for some time, the breath being completely knocked out of him by the last fall; and ere long, the corporal came up, with his wig plastered to his face, his clothes drenched, and presenting altogether a strong resemblance to a drowned rat. He was very angry with Proddy, whom he accused of taking a cowardly and dishonourable advantage of him, and expressed great anxiety to renew the fight. Nor was the coachman anything loth, so that it required all the efforts of the serjeant and Bimbelot, to restore peace, which being at last effected, the disputants shook hands, and so warmed towards each other, that in less than five minutes, they embraced, and swore an eternal friendship.

Bimbelot, who really was a very good-natured little fellow, asked the whole party to breakfast, and they were just walking off, when, as if struck by a sudden thought, he halted, and cried aloud, "Ah! I just recollect. Stupid dat I was to forget. My master has an affair of honour on his hands dis morning, and hereabouts. Let us go see for him. Our assistance may be needed."

"Who is your master going to fight, Bamby?" asked the serjeant.

"Monsieur Masham," replied Bimbelot; "de young equerry who pretend to de hand of Mademoiselle Hill."

Scales appeared to reflect upon the information, and the party commenced their search, shaping their course in a north-westerly direction. They had not proceeded far, when, guided by the clash of steel, they

perceived, in a hollow among the trees, five persons, two of whom were stripped to the shirt, and engaged in conflict, while their companions stood at a little distance from them.

"Ah! voilà non maître!" exclaimed Bimbelot, halting with the others under the shelter of a tree at the edge of the hollow, where they could see what was passing, without being noticed.

The two principals in the conflict, as had been rightly conjectured, were Guiscard and Masham, and the seconds Saint-John and Maynwaring. The fifth person was a surgeon, with a case of instruments under his arm. The combatants were extremely well matched, and the rapidity and skill with which the various thrusts were made and parried, elicited the applause of the serjeant.

"How beautifully that quinte-thrust was parried by Mr. Masham, Bamby," he cried. "Did you see how he held his wrist in high-carte, with a low point, and put by his adversary's point, by opposing the forte of his outside edge?"

"Vraiment, c'est bon," replied Bimbelot —"mais voyez avec quelle addresse mon maître forme la parade d'octave."

"But see," cried the serjeant, "Mr. Masham makes the cavé, and reversing his edge from the inside to the outside, throws off the thrust. And look—look! the marquis makes a pass in carte over the arm—Mr. Masham parries, and quickly returns in seconde, thrusting and opposing and outward edge. Ah, that pass has told—his point enters his adversary's breast."

As the last pass was delivered, the whole party ran down the side of the dell, but

before they reached the bottom, the marquis had fallen. Bimbelot immediately went up to him, and the shirt being opened, the wound was examined by the surgeon, who pronounced that it was not dangerous, the sword having glanced across the ribs under the arm. The pain of the wound, and the effusion that ensued, had caused faintness, but restoratives being applied, by the aid of Bimbelot and the serjeant, he was conveyed to a chair, which was in waiting at a little distance among the trees.

"You have behaved like a man of honour, Masham," said Saint-John, at the close of the combat. "You and Maynwaring must come and breakfast with me, and afterwards I will go with you to Harley. You were perfectly right about Abigail, though I couldn't tell you so before. She

detests Guiscard, and I think has a tenderness for you."

"In that case I have not fought in vain," replied Masham, sheathing his sword.

CHAPTER XIV.

HARLEY DISCOVERS THAT CERTAIN IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN ABSTRACTED BY GREG — HIS UNEASINESS IS INCREASED BY A MESSAGE FROM THE MARQUIS DE GUISCARD.

On their return from the duel, it being still very early, Saint-John proposed to the others that they should repose themselves for a short time before breakfast, to which both readily agreeing, Masham was shewn to a chamber, where, being much fatigued—for he had not closed his eyes during the night—he threw himself upon a couch, and almost instantly fell asleep.

Aroused by the entrance of a servant, who told him breakfast was served, and assisted him to repair his toilette, he descended to the lower room, and was greeted as he approached it by the sound of merry voices and laughter. He found Mrs. Hyde and Angelica at table with the host and Maynwaring, and some progress seemed to have been already made in the meal.

A blooming countenance is always a pleasant object of contemplation in a morning; and notwithstanding her embarrassment, Angelica looked quite charming,—her complexion was so fresh, her eyes so liquid, and her teeth so white. She gazed with ill-concealed admiration at all around her—at the silver covers, shrouding the savoury omelette, the piquant cutlet, and the well-peppered grill; at the eggs reposing in the snowy napkin; at the exqui-

sitely chased silver tea-kettle, with its spirit lamp, and still more exquisite chocolate-pot; at the delicious little blue tea-cups of the choicest porcelain; at the silver flagons for those who preferred claret to the simpler beverages; and having surveyed all this, her eyes wandered to the sideboard, with its well-ordered array of cold chicken, cold ham, tongue, raised pie, and potted meats; while, hard by, a portly butler met her gaze, ready to carve the viands, or to dispense the contents of certain long-necked flasks, with which an adjoining cooler was filled.

Like all country girls, who enjoy good health, Angelica had a tolerable appetite; and she knew too little of modish manners to put any restraint upon it. She took, therefore, with gratitude all that was offered her; but her doings in the eating line were

mere child's-play compared with those of her mother, who was in ecstasies with the repast, and devoured everything before her.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Hyde, "why, this is a much grander breakfast than we had at Squire Clavering's, when his daughter Sukey was married. Do taste the ham, Jelly! I'm a good hand at curing a ham myself, but this beats me. The tongue, too, is boiled to a bubble—there's a great art in boiling a tongue, as I'm sure your cook knows, Mr. Saint-John—another slice, if you please, sir. Well, I don't mind a kidney, since you're so pressing. Jelly, my love, you don't eat! Bless the poor thing! she has fretted so much about her father, that she has quite lost her appetite. Try a little of this apricot marmalade, my dear. It'll do you good. Mr. Saint-John says he'll

soon procure the dear man's liberation, so you may be perfectly easy. You see, I'm quite comfortable. Well, I've eaten a great deal, but I can't refuse a cutlet—it looks so nice. A few mushrooms with it, by all means. Another dish of tea, if you please, sir," to the footman. "You're very good. I shouldn't object to a drop of brandy in it. But it must only be a drop—mind that! You've a design upon me, Mr. Saint-John, or you wouldn't offer me some of the omelette. The first and last omelette I tasted was at the squire's, and I thought it so good then, that I can't refuse now. Jelly, my dear, you're doing nothing. Do eat, child; and recollect you don't get such a breakfast as this every day. You're quite right, Mr. Saint-John, an egg can do nobody any harm. Ah! there we country folk have the advantage of you. You should

taste *our* eggs, sir,—fresh laid, white as snow,—they *are* a treat. Jelly fetches them every morning from the nest. You've such a way with you, Mr. Saint-John, that I can't say no. I must taste the pigeon-pie, though positively I've eaten so much, that I begin to feel quite uncomfortable. Don't look at me, Jelly, but take care of yourself. A little gravy, sir," to the butler, "while you're about it."

It was at this juncture that Masham entered the room.

"I'm afraid Mr. Masham will find little to eat," cried Mrs. Hyde. "We've got half an hour's start of him."

"Don't distress yourself about me, madam," he replied. "Abundance is still left upon the table, and I'll soon make up for lost time."

"Angelica says she should have broken

her heart if Guiscard had killed you, Masham," Saint-John observed.

"Nay, I said another lady would break her heart," she replied. "But I should have been purely sorry myself, I must own."

The young equerry bowed.

"You awaken a tender interest in all the ladies, Masham," remarked Maynwaring.

"It's not to be wondered at," said Angelica, "considering——"

And she blushed and hesitated.

"Pray finish your speech, my dear," cried Maynwaring. "Considering what?"

"I don't know what I was going to say," she rejoined, with increased confusion.

"Do let Mr. Masham eat his breakfast, Jelly," said Mrs. Hyde. "Try one of these cutlets, sir; you'll find 'em excellent—or these kidneys, they're broiled to perfection. And so you have killed the marquis? My

worthy husband declares that a duellist is a murderer, and ought to be hanged. But then he's rather too severe; and, as I tell him, if that was to be the case, we should hang some of the first quality; and would you believe it, he answered, 'And a good thing, too.' *Do* take a little of this peach preserve, sir; you'll find it delicious."

"How far Masham deserves hanging, I know not," said Saint-John, laughing; "but you are mistaken, madam, in supposing he has killed the marquis. He has only very slightly wounded him."

"More's the pity, I think," cried Mrs. Hyde. "But if the officer spoke the truth last night, he has only been saved from one death for another more ignominious."

"May be," observed Saint-John, somewhat gloomily.

But instantly resuming his former gaiety,

he turned the conversation to the various amusements and attractions of town-life—expatiating upon the theatres, the opera, the concerts, the public gardens, the balls, the masquerades, the drives in the park, the promenades on the Mall, and drew such a captivating picture of fashionable existence that it quite charmed Angelica's fancy.

"Dear me!" she sighed, "how purely happy those fine ladies must be, who can lie a-bed as late as they like; and have nothing to do but amuse themselves when they get up. How I wish I had been born to such a lot! I should like of all things to have a little black page with a white turban and feathers on his head—a nice room with great japan screens, and cabinets full of lovely chayney monsters—a French perruquier to dress my hair—the richest silks and satins for my gowns, and the

finest lace for my caps and pinners; but most of all, I should like to have a grand gilt charrot, with three footmen behind it, and a fat coachman on the box. Oh, it would be purely nice!"

"Save us! how sinfully the wench talks!" cried Mrs. Hyde. "It's very well your father doesn't hear you, or he would reprove you for your vanity."

"All this may be yours, Angelica," said Saint-John, in a low tone to her. "You have only to say the word."

"I think I had better give up the gilt charrot, and the fat coachman," sighed Angelica, looking down.

"You'll be a great deal happier and healthier if you continue to get up at five o'clock of a morning, to help Dolly to milk the cows, Jelly," said Mrs. Hyde, "than if you were to lie a-bed till eleven or twelve,

and then get up with the vapours and a headache; and Tom the farming lad will wait upon you as well as the little black boy; and as to the chayney gimcracks and monsters, I'm sure my delf is prettier by half, and my pewter plates brighter than any silver; and if you must ride, you know you can always have the cart and the old mare; or if you want to go to Thaxted, Phil Tredget will be too happy to give you a seat behind him on the pillion. You seem to have forgotten poor Phil."

"No, I haven't," replied Angelica, with a look of mingled vexation and shame, and who had vainly endeavoured to check her mother's volubility; "I think of him as much as he deserves. But nobody knows him here."

"Phil's as honest a lad as any in Essex," said Mrs. Hyde; "and as good-

looking, too, though I say it to you, Mr. Masham, who're an Essex gentleman yourself. He's about your height, sir; but a good deal broader across the shoulders, and with fine curly auburn hair, with a red tinge in it."

"His hair's as red as carrots," cried Angelica.

"Oh, I've no doubt he has the advantage of me immeasurably," replied Masham, laughing heartily.

"And so you've given your heart to Phil Tredget, eh — Angelica?" inquired Saint-John.

"Not quite," she replied, blushing.

"Then Phil deceived himself strangely, Jelly," rejoined her mother.

"I didn't know my own mind then," said Angelica, with a furtive glance at Saint-John.

"To be sure not," he replied, with a meaning look. "Well, since you've finished breakfast, Masham, we'll proceed to business. Pray amuse yourselves here in the best way you can, ladies, till I send Mr. Hyde to you." So saying he arose, and, accompanied by his two friends, quitted the room.

"What do you mean to do with the girl?" asked Maynwaring, as they issued into the street.

"Faith, I don't know," replied Saint-John; "but she's devilish pretty."

Maynwaring acquiesced in the opinion, and quitted them at the corner of King-street, while the two others proceeding to Mr. Harley's residence in Saint James's Square, were without delay ushered into his presence.

They found Harley alone, and engaged

in writing. His looks were troubled, and after congratulating Masham on the result of the duel, he took Saint-John into an inner room, and said to him—"This arrest of Greg gives me great uneasiness. I have been revolving the matter all the morning, and am still full of perplexity."

"Have you in any way trusted him?" asked Saint-John.

"No," replied Harley; "but it is impossible to say what the villain has done. He may have opened my boxes—my letters; and secrets of vital importance may have become known to him."

"Rest easy," replied Saint-John. "No credit will be attached to any statements he may make, unless borne out by proof."

"But I fear he *has* proof," replied Harley. "I have examined the escritoir in which I keep my secret papers, and there is

one packet missing, which, if it should fall into the hands of Godolphin and Marlborough, would ruin me."

"Cursed unlucky, indeed!" exclaimed Saint-John. "I would almost recommend a flight to France."

"No, I will stay and confront the danger, whatever it may be," replied Harley. "Would I could know the worst! But I dare not hold any communication with Greg."

The silence into which both fell was broken by the entrance of the usher, who said that Parson Hyde was in the anteroom, and begged an immediate interview with Mr. Harley, his business being of the utmost importance.

"Shew him in at once," cried the secretary. "As this man was arrested with Greg, we shall now probably learn some-

thing," he added to Saint-John, as the usher left the room.

The next moment, Hyde was introduced.

"You have heard of my arrest, gentlemen, I presume?" he said, bowing respectfully.

"We have, sir," answered Harley; "and are glad to see you at liberty."

"My detention was the result of misrepresentation, as it turns out," the divine replied; "but the consciousness of innocence supported me; and my confinement for the night in the Gate-house has been the sole inconvenience I have endured."

"But what of your fellow-prisoner, Greg? Has he been released too?" asked Harley, hastily.

"No, sir," returned Hyde. "It is on his account I have come to you."

"Well, sir, proceed. What have you to say concerning him?" demanded Harley.

"I scarcely know how to justify what I have done," replied Hyde; "but I could not refuse to aid a friend in misfortune. As I have said, I was locked up in a chamber at the Gate-house with my poor friend, and as soon as the door was closed upon us, he extorted from me, by urgent solicitations, a promise to do him a service, provided I was set at liberty, which he foresaw I should be, the first thing in the morning. This was to go to the Marquis de Guiscard, whose address in Pall Mall he gave me, and tell him what had happened."

"Is that all?" cried Harley, impatiently.

"No, sir," replied Hyde. "He bade me tell the marquis to open a small box which he had entrusted to his care a few days ago, and with its contents purchase safety for him from you."

"That box contains the missing packet,

I'll be sworn," whispered Harley to Saint-John. "Well, sir," he added, to the divine, "you went to the marquis, I suppose—but you did not see him? He has been wounded in a duel this morning."

"Pardon me, Mr. Harley," replied Hyde; "I *did* see him. On learning that I wished to speak with him, the marquis caused me to be introduced to his bedside, and dismissed his attendants. I then delivered poor Greg's message to him, upon which he instantly rang for his French valet, and bade him take a small box from a cabinet to which he pointed, and break it open. This was done, and a packet of letters was found within it. Having examined them, the marquis's countenance brightened up, and he cried, 'A thousand thanks, reverend sir! You have done me infinitely more good than the surgeon who has just quitted me. These

letters will save our poor friend, and I am glad of it. But do me a further favour. Go to Mr. Harley, and tell him, as he values himself, to come to me instantly. I would go to him, but I cannot quit my chamber, and not a moment is to be lost. Observe the greatest caution.' And with a few words more, he dismissed me. This is all I have to relate."

"And enough, too," muttered Saint-John.

"The marquis is the dupe of some trickery on the part of Greg, I fear," said Harley, vainly trying to mask his uneasiness. "Nevertheless, I will comply with his request."

"You will do well," observed Saint-John; "for though I cannot conceive how these letters can serve Greg, yet it may be desirable to see them. You will find your wife

and daughter at my house in Saint James's-place, hard by, Mr. Hyde; and as they have been much alarmed by your arrest, it will be well to set their minds at ease as soon as possible. Pray make my house your home for the present."

"I return you my humble thanks, sir," replied Hyde, bowing respectfully, and quitting the room.

"I will go to this rascal marquis at once," said Harley. "I shall have to buy these letters dearly,—but buy them I will. I have a plan which I think will succeed. Remain with Masham, my dear friend, till I return. I shall not be long."

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRICE PAID FOR THE LETTERS.

Followed by a queen's-messenger, whom he had hastily summoned, and to whom he gave certain instructions, Harley proceeded to Pall Mall. On arriving at the marquis's, he posted the messenger near the door, and knocking, was admitted by the grinning and obsequious Bimbelot, who, in reply to his inquiries, informed him that his master was somewhat easier, but, expecting the honour of a visit from Mr. Harley, hoped he would

excuse being shewn to his bed-room, as he was unable to leave it.

With these, and many more apologies, the valet led the way, with much ceremony, to a most luxurious chamber, in which stood a large canopy-bed with brocade hangings, a superbly-appointed toilette table, a cheval-glass, hung with muslin, two magnificent wardrobes in one corner, and a range of peruke-stands. Over the chimney-piece was a fine picture of the Judgment of Paris, and there were other pieces of a similar nature hung about the room.

On a couch, and partly covered by a loose silk dressing-gown, lay the marquis. The swarthy hue of his complexion had given place to a deathly pallor, and, notwithstanding Bimbelot's assurance that he was free from pain, he seemed to suffer acutely. He made an effort, however, to raise

himself on Harley's appearance, begged him to be seated, and motioned the valet to retire.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Harley," he said, with a smile, which communicated a sinister effect to his ghastly features; "I was sure you would come. You have been told by the worthy clergyman I dispatched to you what has happened?"

"I have been informed by him that certain letters, which I have reason to believe have been purloined from my escritoir by the villain Greg, have come into your possession," replied the secretary.

"You have been correctly informed, sir," rejoined Guiscard. "Those letters, which are of the last importance, as proving that a correspondence subsists between one of Queen Anne's ministers and an exiled royal family, were entrusted to me by the poor

devil you mention, who now wishes me to make terms by means of them for his safety; but I need scarcely say I require them for myself."

"You are sufficiently unscrupulous, I am aware, marquis," replied Harley, bitterly.

"Would you do otherwise if you were similarly circumstanced, Mr. Secretary?" rejoined Guiscard, in a derisive tone. "But to the point. No matter how obtained, these documents are in my possession. With them I can purchase perfect security from Godolphin and Marlborough, so that I have no further uneasiness. Before doing so, however, I offer them to you, as they are of more value to you than to any one else."

"Let me hear the price you put upon them?" said Harley, coldly.

"First, protection to myself," replied

Guiscard, "in case Greg's examination should at all implicate me."

"Accorded," rejoined the secretary. "What more?"

"Secondly, the hand of Abigail Hill," said the marquis.

"Refused," replied Harley, in a determined tone.

"Then I shall be compelled to treat with your enemies," said Guiscard.

"Now hear me, marquis," rejoined Harley—"those letters must be mine, and upon my own terms. Knowing with whom I have to deal, I have taken measures accordingly. A queen's messenger awaits my orders at your door, and I have only to speak the word, and your instant arrest will follow. This will effectually prevent you from negotiating with Godolphin and Marlborough; and even if the letters should be

laid before the council, I have little fear of the consequences, so well am I provided against every difficulty. Like a prudent man, therefore, after weighing the chances, and seeing on which side the advantage preponderates, you will incline that way. What I offer is this—freedom from your present jeopardy, and two thousand pounds."

And, as he spoke, he produced a pocket-book, and opening it, displayed a roll of bank-notes. Guiscard leaned back his head, and appeared to reflect.

"I would as lieve perish, as yield Abigail to that accursed Masham!" he cried, at length, with a frightful expression of hatred and bodily anguish.

"She will be his in any case," replied Harley; "and your wisest, and indeed only course, will be to abandon all idea of her, and instantly close with my proposition."

"Say three thousand," rejoined Guiscard; "your post is well worth that sum, and you are certain to lose it, if not your head, if these letters are given up. Say three thousand, and I consent."

"I have gone as far as I care to go, and further than I need have gone," replied Harley, closing the pocket-book. "Make up your mind at once. Mine is made up already."

And he arose from his seat, as if with the intention of leaving the room.

"I have your solemn pledge for my own safety?" said Guiscard.

"So far as I can secure it—undoubtedly," replied the secretary.

"Then here are the letters," said the marquis, delivering the packet to him.

"And here are the notes," replied the other, handing him in exchange the pocket-book.

And while the one examined the letters, to see that they were all right, the other told over the notes. Both were apparently satisfied with their scrutiny.

"You need fear no revelations from Greg, Mr. Harley," said Guiscard. "Your enemies, no doubt, will attempt to tamper with him; but I will give him to understand, through Parson Hyde, whose simplicity will render him a serviceable agent, that his sole hope of escape depends upon his silence. The gallows will set all to rest. Leave him to me."

"Adieu, marquis," replied Harley. "You have seldom made a luckier hit—even at hazard—than this, and it may console you for your defeat by Masham, and for the loss of Abigail."

CHAPTER XVI.

A LOVE-SCENE IN THE QUEEN'S ANTE-CHAMBER—MASHAM IS BANISHED FROM COURT FOR THREE MONTHS.

HARLEY'S triumphant looks on his return announced his success to Saint-John; and after a word or two in private, they separated, relieved of much of the anxiety that had previously oppressed them,—the one to return home, and the other to repair with Masham to Saint James's Palace.

On arriving there, they were conducted

to the ante-room of the queen's private apartments, where they found Abigail and Lady Rivers. The manner of the former was much more cold and constrained towards Masham than he expected, and somewhat disconcerted Harley.

"I have just left her majesty, Mr. Masham," she said. "She has heard of your duel with the Marquis de Guiscard, and is much offended at it. She expressed herself so strongly on the subject to me, that I feel I am hazarding her favour in consenting to see you now."

"If I had been aware of it, I would not have exposed you to any such risk," replied Masham, much piqued. "And I will instantly relieve you from further responsibility."

"That is not at all what Abigail intends, Mr. Masham," cried Lady Rivers, bursting

into a laugh; "and if you were not a very young man, you would not require to be told so. She only wishes you to understand that she would rather displease the queen than not see you."

"I mean no such thing, Lady Rivers," said Abigail, pettishly.

"Then what *do* you mean, my dear?" rejoined Lady Rivers; "for I'm sure you were dying for an interview with Mr. Masham just now, and since you've got your wish, you almost tell him to go."

"On my soul, you are enough to drive a man to distraction, cousin," added Harley; "and I thank my stars I am not in love with you. You seem to blame Masham for this duel, when you know, or ought to know, that you were the cause of it."

"Exactly what her majesty says," replied Abigail. "She rates me as if I could have

helped it; while nobody knows better than Mr. Masham, that he did not consult me when he went to fight."

"No; but he consulted your reputation, cousin," said Harley.

"I can take care of that myself," replied Abigail; "and it will be time enough for Mr. Masham to fight for me, when I elect him my champion. What will the whole court say to it! It will be buzzed about that these rivals, like knights of old, have fought for me, and that I mean to give myself to the conqueror. But I will disappoint them. I will do no such thing. Mr. Masham, I'll be bound, thought more of the effect which this duel would produce upon me than of punishing the marquis for his insolent vaunt. Such chivalrous motives are quite out of date."

"It may be so," replied Masham; "but

unless I have wholly mistaken myself, I was actuated by a better motive than you give me credit for. It was love for you, Abigail, that made me resent the manner in which your name was used. I believed the marquis spoke falsely, and I told him so."

The earnestness with which this speech was uttered dispelled all Abigail's coquetry of manner, as a sudden gust of wind might disperse a rack of clouds hanging over the moon. She trembled, and cast down her eyes. Seeing her emotion, and attributing it to its right cause, Lady Rivers and Harley withdrew to a window, and looked out into the palace-gardens.

"They are likely to come to an understanding now, I think," observed the secretary, in a low tone.

"Very likely," replied the lady, with a smile.

"I cannot carry on this deception further, Mr. Masham," said Abigail, at length. "I have trifled with you too long. It is true the queen is angry, but that is nothing to me. Thinking you would come here, flushed with your success, and anticipating an equally easy conquest over me, I determined to treat you as I have done—lightly. But I find that vanity forms no part of your composition, and it would be unfeeling to pursue such a course further. I am fully sensible of your devotion, and return it. We shall have no more misunderstandings now, depend upon it. Nor shall I again play the coquette—at least, with you."

"Nor with any one else, if I can prevent it," replied Masham, kneeling, and snatching her hand, which he pressed rapturously to his lips. "You are a matchless creature."

At this juncture, the inner door opened,

and the queen, attended by Prince George of Denmark, issued from it. Masham instantly sprang to his feet, but not before his situation had been remarked by the royal pair.

A slight smile passed over the prince's countenance, and he glanced at the queen, but her majesty, whose strict notions of etiquette were greatly outraged, did not respond to it. Masham bowed profoundly to hide his confusion; Abigail blushed, and fanned herself; Prince George took a prodigious pinch of snuff, to prevent himself from laughing outright; while Lady Rivers and Harley returned from the window.

"I am somewhat surprised to see you here, Mr. Masham," said the queen, gravely, "after the disregard you have shewn to my wishes."

"I am not aware that I have dis-

obeyed your majesty," replied the young equerry.

"You have paid little heed, then, to what was said, sir," rejoined the queen, the cloud gathering more darkly on her brow. "Having sufficiently interested myself in you to express a desire that you should not meet the Marquis de Guiscard, I scarcely expected you would so soon afterwards provoke another quarrel with him, the result of which has been a meeting this morning, at which, I understand, he has been wounded."

"The intelligence came from Marlborough House, I'll be sworn," said Harley, aside. "The devil is not more malicious than the duchess."

"The marquis had used my name most unwarrantably," said Abigail. "He deserved his chastisement."

"For Heaven's sake, don't draw down the

queen's resentment on yourself," whispered Harley. "You will put your own place in jeopardy."

"I will risk anything rather than Mr. Masham shall be wrongfully treated!" she replied, in the same tone.

"Faith! your majesty is too hard upon the young man," interposed the good-natured Prince George, in a whisper, to the queen—"sadly too hard. His disregard of your wishes proceeded from inadvertence—sheer inadvertence."

"He shall be taught stricter attention in future," replied the queen. "I am determined to mark my disapprobation of the practice of duelling, and this young man shall be made the first example."

"Nay, madam," entreated the prince.

"I have said it," rejoined the queen, in a tone calculated to put an end to further

discussion. "Mr. Masham," she added, "his highness will dispense with your attendance for the next three months, and you will avail yourself of the opportunity to visit your family in Essex, or to travel during the period."

"I understand your majesty," replied Masham, bowing. "I am banished from court."

Anne made a slight movement of the head, in assent, and Prince George consoled himself with a prolonged pinch of snuff.

"This is the first time I have known your majesty unjust," said Abigail.

"Cousin, be advised," whispered Harley.

"Perhaps you will also call me unjust, Abigail," said the queen, "when I say, that if any one of my attendants gives away her hand without my consent, she will

by so doing vacate her place, and forfeit my favour for ever."

Abigail was about to reply, but a slight pressure upon her arm checked her. The next moment, the adroit secretary passed over to Masham, and whispered to him—"It is proper for you, after what has occurred, to withdraw."

The young equerry instantly advanced to Prince George, kissed the hand which was graciously extended to him, and making a profound obeisance to the queen, was about to retire, when Abigail stopped him.

"I pray your majesty, suffer Mr. Masham to remain a moment longer," she said. "I have a boon to beg of you in his presence."

"If you ask her consent now," whispered Harley, "you will fail. Another time—another time!"

"Mr. Masham, you may go," said Abigail, blushing, and in confusion.

"Nay, since you have called him back, my dear, it is but fair he should hear what you have to say," remarked Prince George, whose good-nature frequently outran his discretion.

"Your majesty has just said, that if any one of your attendants gives away her hand without your consent, she will forfeit your favour for ever," hesitated Abigail.

"Precisely the words I used," replied Anne. "But what have they to do with Mr. Masham? I hope," she continued, in a severe tone, "you have not already taken this step without consulting me."

"Assuredly not, madam," rejoined Abigail, recovering her composure, and disregarding the gestures of Harley, "and though I may have chosen an unfortunate

moment for the request, yet I will venture to entreat your gracious permission to answer in the affirmative, in case Mr. Masham should put a particular question to me."

"I must consider of it," replied the queen, coldly.

"Faith, I'm sorry I called the young man back," cried the prince. "Good day t'ye, Masham—good day t'ye!" he continued, accompanying the equerry to the door. "I hope her majesty will be in a better temper when we next meet. Three months is it, eh? I'll try and get the term shortened. But never mind—soon be over—soon over. And as to Abigail, I'll stand your friend. So don't despair—don't despair. Good day!"

And he pushed him gently out of the room.

As soon as the prince returned, the queen

took his arm, and was about to re-enter the private apartments, when Abigail advanced towards her.

"Does your majesty require my attendance?" she asked.

"Not now," replied Anne, regarding her with a look of greater displeasure than she had ever before evinced towards her. And she disappeared with her august consort.

"This it is to serve a queen," cried Abigail, bursting into tears, and falling upon Lady Rivers's neck.

"You have to thank yourself for much that has occurred," said Harley. "But the duchess is at the bottom of it all."

"She is," replied Abigail, looking up; "but she shall not profit by her malice. The present turn is hers: the next shall be mine."

"There I am with you, cousin," cried

Harley, grasping her hand, warmly. "It will be your own fault if you do not place Masham as high as the proudest noble that presses to Saint James's. Recollect, the fortune of John Churchill was made by Sarah Jennings."

"Meantime, I am in disgrace, and Masham is banished," sighed Abigail.

"Both affairs of a moment," replied Harley. "The wind that blows against us to-day will shift to-morrow. Like the Roman general, we will turn defeat into victory."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERJEANT'S "DRUM."

"I TELL you what it is, Proddy," said the serjeant, as they sat together over a bowl of punch at the Marlborough's Head, in Rider-street—a house patronised by Scales, as well on account of the ensign it bore, as of the admirable quality of the liquors dispensed at it—"I tell you what it is. I'm pleased with the way in which those two Mounseers behaved this morning."

"So am I," replied Proddy. "I'm par-

ticularly pleased with Savagejohn. I hated him at first — but one always begins by hating. I disliked you consumedly once, Serjeant."

"I've been thinking the matter over," said Scales, who was too much engrossed by his own meditations to pay attention to the coachman's remarks; "and I'm resolved to invite 'em to a dance. I know it'll please our women, and it's sure to be to the taste of the Mounseers. They're a merry nation, the French, I will say that for 'em."

"I'm very fond of dancing myself, serjeant; and a tolerably good dancer too, though you would hardly think it," observed Proddy, laying down his pipe, and executing a step or two. "Before I grew so stout I could get through a jig as well as any man. There," he added, cutting

a caper, and poising himself on one foot—"what do you think of that?"

"Capital!" exclaimed Scales. "This decides me. We'll have a hop this night week. The quality call a party of this kind a drum, though why I don't know, for I never heard any drumming at their routs; but if I issue invitations to a drum, as I mean to do, it'll be all right and proper, for the only music my guests will get will be such as I myself can produce from a couple of sticks and a piece of parchment."

"And famous rattlin' music, too, serjeant," rejoined Proddy. "Rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-rara! Call it a drum, by all means."

"I don't know but I may get Tom Jiggins, the fifer of our regiment, to accompany me," said the serjeant, after a moment's reflection; "and in that case

we'll keep you alive, for Tom's a first-rate performer. It wont be the first time the Mounseers have danced to the music of the fife and drum, eh, Proddy?"

"Not by a good many," replied the coachman, chuckling; "and to a pretty quick movement, too, if our gazettes speak truth. But we've concluded a truce now, serjeant; so we must have no more jesting. This night week, you say?"

"This night week," replied Scales. "Of course you'll come?"

"If I'm in the land o' the livin,' of course I will," replied Proddy; "we're two inseparables now. What's your hour?"

"Oh! you'll see that in the card," said Scales. "You'll have an invitation—all reg'lar. But I should say eight, or thereabouts; and if you're too genteel to be punctual, don't make it later than nine."

"I'm always punctual, serjeant," replied Proddy; "every man as holds a office under government is punctual."

"Very right," said Scales. "Come, there's just a glass a-piece in the bowl. May we always be as successful as we've been to-day! It's time we were movin'. I hear the watchman bawlin' out past ten o'clock. I pay."

"No, you don't," cried Proddy.

"I tell you I do," rejoined Scales, authoritatively. "Here drawer," he added, flinging down a crown—"here's your dues. Now, comrade, right foot foremost." And they marched forth arm in arm,—Proddy strutting as usual, and thrusting out his chin, and the serjeant whistling Marlbrook.

Next morning, as he sat at breakfast with the rest of the household, in the servants' hall at Marlborough House, Scales intimated

his intention of giving the drum in the course of the following week; and the announcement was received with unanimous applause by the whole assemblage, and with especial delight by Mesdames Plumpton and Tipping.

"Well, I declare, serjeant!" cried the first-mentioned lady—"a drum! what a charmin' idea! And how impropriate to your perfession. My heart quite beats at the thought of it."

"So genteel too!" added Mrs. Tipping. "So different from the vulgar hop, as they call such things in the city. Ladies of quality give nothing but drums, now-a-days."

"Glad the notion meets with your approval, ladies," rejoined the serjeant. "As Mrs. Plumpton observes, I think it *is* appropriate. I'll do my best to amuse you."

"You've only to drum to amuse me, serjeant," said Mrs. Plumpton.

"Plumpton's sure to take the words out of a body's mouth," cried Mrs. Tipping, sharply.

"I feel the compliment just as much as if it had been uttered, Mrs. Tipping," observed the serjeant, gallantly. "His grace, you think, will have no objection to the party, Mr. Fishwick?" he added, appealing to the cook.

"I'll answer for his grace," replied Fishwick; "and I'll answer also for his gracious permission to provide a good supper."

"As you answer for the solids, I'll answer for the fluids, Mr. Fishwick," said the portly Mr. Peter Parker, the butler, with a knowing wink. "You shall have a bottle or two of wine from my own cupboard, and you shall also have such a bowl of punch as you

never drank before. Mrs. Plumpton, I dare say, will lend me the great blue china bowl that stands in the housekeeper's room to brew it in, so that we can have plenty."

"That I will," replied Mrs. Plumpton; "and as you all contribute something to the feast, I'll add a flask of usquebaugh, that was given me by—by—I forget whom."

"By the late Mr. P——, most likely," suggested Mrs. Tipping, with a sneer. "Well, I don't think *I* shall contribute anything but my company."

"Nothing more is needed," replied Scales, gallantly.

"Of course, you mean to invite Mr. Proddy, serjeant?" said Mrs. Plumpton. "He's such a dear little man!"

"Of course," replied Scales; "and to please Mrs. Tipping, I shall ask Mounseer Bambilot, the Marquis de Guiscard's gen-

tleman, and his friend Corporal Achille Sauvageon,—both magnificent dancers."

"Quite unnecessary to invite 'em on my account, serjeant," replied Mrs. Tipping. "However, I shall be glad to meet any friends of yours."

Soon after this, the serjeant retired to his own room, and with some difficulty, wrote out a number of cards, which were despatched by a trusty messenger, and in due time brought responses in the affirmative from most of the parties invited.

Later on in the day, Fishwick came to inform him that the duke had not only given his full consent to the entertainment, but had expressed a hope that it would pass off pleasantly.

"Did his grace say so?" cried Scales, in a transport of delight. "Well, it's just like him. Bless his kind, good heart! No

wonder his soldiers love him so much, Fishwick, and fight so well for him. It's a pleasure to die for such a commander."

Some little talk was then held between them as to the arrangements of the night, and they separated with a conviction that the Drum would go off remarkably well."

The six intervening days wore away, and the seventh arrived. During the morning, the serjeant's countenance was charged with unwonted importance. He had undertaken a task of which he evidently felt the magnitude. He was continually going backwards and forwards into the kitchen, and giving directions in a low tone to the scullions. Then he withdrew to furbish his accoutrements, to practise a little on the drum, and hum a song in a low key.

About noon, Tom Jiggins, the fifer, arrived, and made his way at once to the ser-

jeant's room, where they were shut up together till dinner-time, rehearsing, it would seem, from the sounds they produced, the dances of the night.

A gaunt, hard-featured little fellow was Tom Jiggins; not unlike the serjeant himself, on a small scale. He had a long nose, a very long upper lip, and a long chin in continuation. And he made the most of his size, standing as high as five feet would allow him. His eyes had the set stare peculiar to performers on wind instruments and cod-fish. Jiggins was dressed in the regimental uniform—blue, with white cuffs and facings, and wore a broad white belt across his left shoulder, to which was attached by a cord the case containing his fife. The opposite hip sustained a sword. A cap, and powdered wig with a long tail, completed his accoutrements.

Dinner over, the fifer and the serjeant had another rehearsal, after which they esteemed themselves perfect, and whiled away the rest of the afternoon over a mug of ale and a pipe.

Evening at last approached, and the business of the day over, active preparations were made for the Drum. The kitchen was cleared out, and lighted up by candles placed upon the chimney-piece, dresser, and plate-shelves; and at a quarter before eight o'clock, when the serjeant and Jiggins entered, all was ready.

Just as the clock struck the appointed hour, a scuffling sound was heard in the passage, and the next moment, Mrs. Plumpton and Mrs. Tipping rushed into the room together, both looking very red and very angry.

"You're excessive rude, Plumpton, to

push so?" cried Mrs. Tipping. "I declare you have quite disarranged my dress."

"Serve you right, too!" replied Mrs. Plumpton, sharply. "You shouldn't have tried to take proceedings of me. You've almost pulled off my cap and pinners."

"I wish I had," rejoined Mrs. Tipping —"and your wig into the bargain."

"Ladies," said the serjeant, "let me entreat, that on this evening, at least, we may have no quarrelling. You're both beautifully dressed, and would be irresistible, if you didn't look quite so cross."

This had the desired effect. Peace was instantly restored. Mrs. Tipping obligingly arranged Mrs. Plumpton's head-dress, and Mrs. Plumpton pinned up Mrs. Tipping's gown. Both were very finely dressed—the one exhibiting her buxom person in crim-

son silk, and the other her trim little figure in orange-coloured satin.

Soon after this, Fishwick, Parker, Timperley, and the rest of the household, male and female, amounting to more than a dozen, flocked into the kitchen, and were welcomed by the serjeant, who had a hearty greeting for every one of them. He had scarcely gone the round, when Timperley, who was stationed at the door to usher in the guests, announced "Mr. Proddy and friend."

Habited in his full-dress coat of crimson velvet, striped with yellow, and bound with gold, with a waistcoat to match, and having a large muslin cravat tied loosely round his throat, the coachman presented a very imposing appearance.

Marching up to Scales, he said, "Serjeant, allow me to present to you Mr. Me-

zansene—a young gentleman who has just been honoured with a place in her majesty's household, and who is desirous of making your acquaintance. I have taken the liberty of bringing him with me."

"No liberty at all, Proddy," replied the serjeant; "you did quite right. Glad to see you, sir."

And he shook hands heartily with Mezansene, who was a tall, slight, and gracefully formed young man, with very good features, except that, like the serjeant, he had a broad black patch across his nose, and another somewhat smaller patch on the left cheek. He was clothed in the royal livery, and wore a full-bottomed, well powdered wig.

"You have been in the wars as well as myself, Mr. Mezansene?" observed the serjeant, in reference to the other's patches.

"These cuts were given me in the street the other night by a party of those wild rakes who call themselves Mohocks, serjeant," replied Mezansene.

"I know the Mohocks well, and nice blades they are," observed the serjeant. "I should like to make some of 'em run the gauntlet for their pranks. That young man's face is familiar to me," he continued, to Proddy, as Mezansene walked towards Mrs. Plumpton and Mrs. Tipping, who were standing near the fire; "I suppose I have seen him at the palace."

"No, you can scarcely have seen him there, serjeant," replied Proddy, "for he only entered the household a few days ago. He came in place of Mr. Chillingworth, one of the servants, who, being taken suddenly ill, was allowed to provide a substitute. I met him in the guard-chamber to-day, and

was so pleased with his manners, that I offered to bring him here."

Before the serjeant could reply, Timperley announced Mr. Needler Webb, the Earl of Sunderland's gentleman, and Mrs. Loveday, the Countess of Bridgewater's lady's-maid. A coat of green embossed velvet, which had very recently been the property of his noble master—a laced satin waistcoat, pink silk hose, and shoes with pink heels, constituted Mr. Needler Webb's attire. He affected a rakish air, and was very much bepatched and perfumed. Mrs. Loveday was equally gaily attired, and dropping a curtsey to the ground, in reply to the serjeant's bow, joined the other ladies.

Next came Mr. Prankard, Lord Ryalton's chief valet, another smart fellow; and after him, a smarter fellow still, Mr. Lascelles, Lord Ross's gentleman. Then came Lady

River's lady's-maid, Mrs. Semple, and Lady Di Cecil's maid, Mrs. Clerges.

Half-a-dozen more arrivals occurred, and the room presented a rather crowded appearance, when Bimbelot and Sauvageon were announced. With a mincing gait, the vain little French valet advanced towards the serjeant, and then bowed to the ladies. It was easy to see that he thought himself the best-bred, the best-dressed, and the best-looking person in the room. His master being still confined to his couch from the effects of the duel, Bimbelot thought it a good opportunity of wearing his full-dress suit, and accordingly he appeared in a coat of scarlet cloth bound with gold, a magnificent waistcoat, a campaign wig, a laced cravat and ruffles. The splendour of his attire won him the admiration of the fairer portion of the company, which he was not

slow to perceive, but ogled them very familiarly all round, kissing his hand, grinning, bowing, and chattering. As to Sauvageon, he contented himself with talking to Proddy.

Mulled wine and biscuits were now handed round, and shortly afterwards, the serjeant took possession of a stool at the upper end of the room, and beat a call, while Jiggins perched himself on a chair behind him.

This was understood to be the signal for dancing, and the ball was opened by a minuet, in which Bimbelot and Mrs. Loveday, and Needler Webb and Mrs. Clerges were the performers; and in spite of the shrillness of the music, which was not exactly in unison with the grave measure of the dance, the two couples not only acquitted themselves to their own satisfaction, but to that of everybody else. Mezansene and Mrs. Semple next stood up for a rigadoon,

and executed it with so much spirit that an encore was called for.

"Qui est ce jeune homme là, sergent?" inquired Bimbelot. "Il ressemble diablement à quelqu'un de mes amis, mais qui, je ne puis pas rappeller."

"I'm quite as much perplexed as you are, Bamby," replied Scales. "For the life of me I can't make out who he is like. I'll ask him, when an opportunity offers."

It occurred immediately afterwards. The young man having quitted his partner, came towards them.

"Mr. Mezansene," said Scales, "Bamby and I have discovered a great resemblance between you and——"

"Whom?" demanded the other, with a slight start.

"Nay, don't be alarmed—between you and a friend of ours, whose name we can't

at this moment recollect. Have you ever been thought like anybody?"

"Not that I'm aware of," replied Mezansene, carelessly. "But it's very possible."

"Mezansene—c'est un nomme François, monsieur!" cried Bimbelot. "Vous êtes mon compatriote?"

"Pas tout-à-fait, monsieur," replied Mezansene; "mais ma mère etait Française."

"Ah, votre mêre etait Française—c'est assez—c'est assez!" cried Bimbelot, embracing him. "J'etois sur que vous etiez François—vous êtes si beau—vous dansez si legerement!—je suis fier de vous, mon ami."

And tapping Mezansene on the breast, he led him to Sauvageon, who appeared equally enchanted with their new acquaintance.

Meantime, a cotillon had been called for; then followed a jig, in which Proddy and

Mrs. Plumpton distinguished themselves, occasioning immense laughter by their extraordinary and unexpected agility; after that succeeded the fine old dance of "the hay;" and after a breathing-pause had been allowed, and refreshments handed round, the pretty and animating cushion-dance was performed — the serjeant drumming away all the while with untiring spirit, and Jiggins only stopping now and then to wet his whistle.

The cushion-dance concluded, all sat down, and to be sure, such flourishing of handkerchiefs, such puffing and blowing, and such mopping of warm faces as followed! It was delectable to witness it, at least so thought the serjeant.

In the midst of it all, Mr. Parker marched into the kitchen, bearing an immense bowl (Mrs. Plumpton's loan) of cold punch,

which he proceeded to set down upon the dresser. The moment was admirably chosen; and as large goblets of the cool and fragrant beverage were handed round, it was pronounced to be more delicious than nectar. And then the laughter and jokes that followed! Talk of champagne!—the best champagne ever grown would not have done its duty half so well, or so quickly, as that bowl of punch. Your health, serjeant, in a glass of it.

Again the serjeant's drum beats merrily rat-a-tat, and again the fife pours forth its shrilly notes.

By this time, all are in such tip-toe spirits that nothing but a country-dance will serve their turn, and accordingly partners are chosen, Proddy selecting Mrs. Plumpton, Bimbelot Mrs. Tipping, Needler Webb Mrs. Semple, Mezansene Mrs. Love-

day, and the others suiting themselves as they can. In another instant all are in their places, forming two lines, extending the whole length of the kitchen, the fifer playing the liveliest tune imaginable, and Scales coming in every now and then, when required, with a most inspiriting rub-a-dub.

Proddy and Mrs. Plumpton led off, and if they have distinguished themselves in the jig they surpass their former efforts now. Wonderful is it to behold how lightly Proddy skips about, how he flies down the middle, turns his partner, and winds, without giddiness or apparent fatigue, through all the mazes and labyrinths of the bewildering dance. Even Scales cannot refuse his applause, but cheers him as he bounds along. And well is he seconded by Mrs. Plumpton. She dances with astonishing

lightness and energy, and never flags for a moment till they reach the bottom, where a couple of glasses of punch refresh them, and stimulate them to new exertions. Bimbelot and Mrs. Tipping are soon beside them, and in a marvellously short space of time they find themselves at the top once more.

"Why, you're not going down again, Proddy?" cried the serjeant.

"Yes, but I am though!" cried the coachman, throwing open his coat, and displaying the full breadth of his chest, and the voluminous glories of his striped waistcoat. "I won't be the first to give in, I can promise you. Blow away, fifer! Drum away, serjeant! And do you, girl," he added to a scullion who was standing on a chair near the fire-place, laughingly surveying the group, "take the snuff from those candles, and throw a little more light on

the subject. Now Bamby, my boy, stir your stumps!"

And as he spoke, he recommenced, with greater spirit than ever, twirling about, and cutting all sorts of fantastic capers, while his example was followed by Bimbelot, who was excited to a pitch of the most hilarious enthusiasm.

But the coachman was not destined to bring his second passage to an equally successful conclusion with the first. As he was in mid-career, a foot was put forward, whether designedly or otherwise could not be ascertained, but down he came, dragging his partner with him, and upsetting Sauvageon and Needleer Webb. Nor was this all. Bimbelot and Mrs. Tipping, who were following closely in his wake at a headlong pace, found it impossible to stop, and tumbled over him, while Mr. Lascelles and Mrs.

Clerges in their turn tumbled over them, thus completely burying the poor coachman. Fortunately, he was rescued from his perilous position before he was quite suffocated; but a stop was put to the dance, and Mr. Parker proposed that they should adjourn to the supper, which awaited them in the servants'-hall—a proposition that was eagerly agreed to.

Amply had Mr. Fishwick redeemed his promise to provide a good supper, and the abundance and substantial character of the repast proved his perfect conception of the powers of those who were to be its consumers. The centre of the table was occupied by a large raised pie, shaped like a drum, on the top of which was mounted a little baked model of the serjeant himself, pronounced as "like as life" by Mrs. Plumpton and Mrs. Tipping, and so accu-

rately representing the original that you might see the very patch on his nose.

At the upper end of the table, where the serjeant sat of course, was a noble sirloin of cold beef; and at the other end was a gigantic barrel, or rather tub, of oysters. A goodly ham, tongues, cold fowls, lobsters, and less substantial matters, in the shape of sweets and jellies, constituted the remainder of the repast.

But if the cook had been bountiful in his supply of eatables, the butler was not much behind him in a due provision of drinkables. Jugs of punch were placed at short intervals, with a bottle of wine between each, and a mighty tankard of hot-spiced ale, with a toast floating in it, flanked the sirloin. Altogether, the board presented as inviting an appearance as guests who had earned famous appetites by healthful and agreeable

exercises could desire, and they gathered eagerly round it.

Scales was supported on either hand by Mrs. Plumpton and Ms. Tipping, and carved away at the sirloin as if he were hewing down the ranks of the enemy; while Fishwick faced him, and took charge of the oysters, opening them with a rapidity only equalled by the quickness of their disappearance. Then for a brief while was there silence, broken only by the clatter of knives and forks; but as soon as a few glasses of punch had been swallowed, laughter and jest broke forth anew, with additional force, and were never afterwards hushed—not even by the plates of toasted cheese that followed the removal of the beef and oysters.

The mighty tankard then went round, exciting much merriment as it described its

circuit, from the circumstance of Bimbelot and other gallants striving to drink from the particular spots pressed by the sweet lips that had preceded them. Lastly, Mrs. Plumpton's bottle of usquebaugh was introduced, and proved peculiarly acceptable to those who thought the oysters sat rather coldly on the stomach.

The serjeant then rising, requested bumpers to be filled all round, and with great earnestness proposed, "The Queen and the Duke of Marlborough!" The toast was drank with prodigious enthusiasm. Proddy next got on a chair, and calling out for fresh bumpers, proposed "the giver of the drum," and amid the hurrahs that followed it, unintentionally threw the contents of his glass into Bimbelot's face.

The serjeant returned thanks in a song, and seeing that the spirits of his guests had

reached a point of elevation, any increase beyond which might be dangerous, he suggested a return to the dancing-room, and a movement was made thither accordingly.

The fifer played a country-dance, and Proddy would fain have re-engaged Mrs. Plumpton, but Bimbelot had been beforehand with him, which, together with the valet's triumphant grin, so exasperated the coachman, that he presently contrived to jostle the Frenchman, and in doing so, pushed him rather forcibly against Mezansene, who, fancying the attack intentional, replied by a kick, so well applied that it sent the little valet capering to the other end of the room.

The dancers instantly stopped, and the serjeant, abandoning his drum, rushed to interpose. But all would not do. Bimbelot

was furious, and demanded instant satisfaction; upon which Scales declared, if he fought anybody, it must be him, as he was determined to espouse Mezansene's quarrel —the latter being a stranger. The little Frenchman then turned his wrath upon the mediator, affirming that he displayed the grossest partiality, and that, sooner than not fight at all, after the outrageous insult he had received, he *would* fight him—a decision in which he was confirmed by Sauvageon.

After considerable altercation, as no arrangement could be come to, the irate parties withdrew to a back chamber, attended by the male portion of the assemblage, when the serjeant, who had retired to his own room for a moment, returned with a pair of huge horse-pistols, at the sight of which Bimbelot was observed to turn excessively pale.

"Here are pistols, ready loaded," said Scales; "and since you're determined to fight, have it out at once."

"Je suis content," said Mezansene. "Nous tirerons à travers un mouchoir, si vous voulez, Monsieur Bimbelot."

"No," replied Scales. "We'll remove the candles—and then you shall shoot at each other in the dark. That'll be the best way to settle it."

This proposition was not entirely satisfactory to Bimbelot; but on a word from Sauvageon, he acceded to it. Each combatant having taken a pistol, the candles were removed, and they were left together in the dark.

Not a word was spoken on either side, nor any movement made, so as to be audible, for a few moments. Mezansene, who had laughed at the whole affair, was determined

to abide his opponent's fire; but as the other appeared so slow, he grew impatient, and came to the resolution of discharging his own pistol. But how to do so without mischief was the question. "I don't want to hurt the poor fellow," he thought; "and in whatever direction I fire I may chance to hit him. Ah, a plan occurs to me!"

The scheme was no sooner thought of than put into execution. He stepped forward noiselessly till his hand touched the wall, and then felt along it till he came to the fire-place. Putting the pistol up the chimney, he drew the trigger, and immediately after the discharge a heavy body came tumbling down.

A strange surmise crossed Mezansene, which was confirmed the next moment, when lights appeared. Poor Bimbelot had taken refuge in the chimney, and his adver-

sary, in his anxiety to avoid him, had chanced upon his hiding-place. Luckily, no damage was done him, further than a few trifling bruises occasioned by the fall, and the serjeant informed Mezansene, privately, that "if Bamby was hit at all, it must have been with the wadding, for he had merely put powder in the pistols."

Mezansene kept this piece of information to himself, though he laughed heartily at it, nor did he say anything of what he knew of Bimbelot's place of refuge. Matters were therefore easily adjusted. Hands were again shaken: more punch was introduced; more dancing followed; more jokes; a great deal more laughter; and the serjeant's drum terminated as merrily as it began.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANOTHER LOVE-SCENE IN THE ANTE-CHAMBER.

ONE morning, about a week after this merry party, the door of the queen's private apartments in Saint James's palace opened, and Abigail and Lady Rivers entered the ante-chamber. No one was there except the new attendant, Mezansene, who drew back respectfully as they paused.

"I have come with you, my dear Lady Rivers," said Abigail, "to learn if you have received any tidings of Masham."

"I guessed your motive," replied the other; "but I am sorry I can tell you nothing more of him than that it is believed he is gone abroad. He is certainly not with his father, Sir Francis Masham, at High Laver, for a letter was received from the old baronet yesterday, by Lord Rivers, in which he made inquiries after his son."

"How very strange!" exclaimed Abigail. "As far as I can learn, young Masham has written to no one. On quitting the palace, it appears, he immediately went home; after which, giving some directions to his confidential servant, remarking that he should probably not return for two or three months, and that no inquiries need be made about him, he set out unattended, and has not been heard of since. All Mr. Harley's inquiries have been fruitless. I own, I begin to feel very uneasy, and though I try to

reason myself out of my apprehensions I cannot succeed."

"Oh! you needn't be alarmed about his safety," returned Lady Rivers. "It's more than likely he has gone to Paris to amuse himself at that gay court."

"Perhaps so," said Abigail. "But then he might write."

"But consider the attractions of the French capital, my dear!" rejoined Lady Rivers, somewhat maliciously. "Besides, he may have fallen in love again."

"I don't think it likely," cried Abigail.

"And do you really—seriously imagine he will remain constant to you during his exile, my dear?" asked Lady Rivers.

"I should not bestow another thought on him if I supposed otherwise," replied Abigail.

"And how as to yourself?" continued

her ladyship. "Can you remain constant, too?"

"I may answer for myself more positively than for him," rejoined Abigail. "I can."

"Well, three months is a long time," said Lady Rivers. "It would try me very hard—especially if I were exposed like you to the attentions of so many agreeable fellows. Three months—Poor Masham! he stands but a slight chance—ha! ha!"

"Your ladyship may laugh as much as you please," replied Abigail, in a tone of pique; "but if I know myself, my sentiments will continue unchanged."

"So you think now, my dear," rejoined Lady Rivers; "but scarcely a fortnight has elapsed since his departure. Come, I'll lay you a wager you forget him before the month is out. Hush!" she exclaimed,

pointing to Mezansene with her fan; "that young man is listening to us. We'll talk of this another time. Good day, my dear."

"If you hear anything of Masham, be sure and let me know it," said Abigail.

"Be sure I will," replied Lady Rivers. "I hope I shan't have any unpleasant intelligence to communicate—that he has got a new lady-love!—ha! ha!"

"In pity, spare me!" cried Abigail.

"Oh, that he could see you now," cried Lady Rivers, screaming with laughter. But she suddenly checked herself, muttering—"that young man again."

"Your ladyship is excessively cruel," said Abigail. "To hear you laugh thus, one would think you had never been in love yourself."

"Perhaps I never have," replied Lady Rivers; "but at all events, I profess no

romantic constancy. And now adieu, for I really must go." With this she left the room, the door being opened for her by Mezansene.

"Oh, the pain of being separated from the object of one's regard!" exclaimed Abigail, half aloud. "Every occupation loses its interest—every pleasure its zest; and though the surface may appear as bright and gay as ever, the heart will ache bitterly the while, and tears—bitter tears flow in secret. Heigho! The queen must not see I have been weeping," she added, drying her eyes with her handkerchief.

As she was moving towards the inner door, Mezansene followed her. He was greatly embarrassed; but Abigail was too much confused to notice him particularly.

"I have a letter for you, Miss Hill," he said, in a voice husky with emotion.

"For me!" cried Abigail, in surprise. "It must be from him!" she exclaimed, as she took it.

Unable to resist the impulse, she broke the seal, and eagerly devoured its contents.

"He has not left London, he writes," she murmured, in irrepressible delight—"he will contrive to see me soon—here—in the palace! But how, and when, he does not state. Where did you get this letter?" she asked of Mezansene, but without daring to raise her eyes.

"I am bound to secrecy," he replied, still in troubled tones; "but thus much I may say,—he who wrote it is now in the palace."

"Here!—imprudent!" exclaimed Abigail, placing her hand on her heart.

"You look faint, madam," cried Mezansene; "shall I bring a chair?"

"No, it is passed," replied Abigail; "but are my senses wandering? Have I cheated myself into the belief that I heard his voice? Is it," she added, looking up, and regarding Mezansene, fixedly—"is it you, Masham?"

"It is indeed, Abigail," replied the young man, falling on his knee before her, and pressing her hand rapturously to his lips.

"And you have run this risk for me?" she said, with a look of grateful tenderness.

"I would brave death itself, to be near you, Abigail," he replied, passionately. "I could not obey the queen's harsh mandate. I could not tear myself from you. But not daring to present myself in my own person, I assumed this disguise. I bribed one of the royal servants, Chillingworth, whom I knew to be a trusty fellow, to feign illness,

and to engage me as his substitute. I am at present known by my mother's maiden name of Mezansene. Though I have been in the palace nearly a fortnight, until this moment I have not had an opportunity of speaking to you, without incurring needless risk. But I have seen you often, Abigail —often, when you have not noticed me. I have seen you look pensive, and have persuaded myself that the sadness was occasioned by my supposed absence. Oh! how I have longed to approach you—to make a sign to you—to hazard a whisper—but I restrained myself. I was content to see you—to be near you—for I knew a time of meeting would come."

"It is well you failed in making me aware of your presence," said Abigail, "for if I had perceived you suddenly, I should infallibly have betrayed myself. If you are

discovered, our hopes are for ever blighted. The queen will never forgive me; and the duchess has so many spies, that the utmost caution is necessary."

"I have hitherto escaped detection," replied Masham; "and now that I have made you aware of my propinquity, I shall be more easy, and therefore less liable to be thrown off my guard. But tell me—are you restored to the queen's favour?"

"Quite," she replied. "For a few days the duchess had regained all her old influence, and during that time made every effort to procure my dismissal. In this object, if she could have controlled her arbitrary temper, she might, perhaps, have succeeded; but, luckily for me, the queen's disinclination to listen to her roused her passion, and she gave vent to it in her customary violence and threats. A breach

followed this explosion; and though it is in some degree made up, a coldness still subsists between them. In my own opinion, and in that of Mr. Harley, the queen never will be reconciled to her again, not even ostensibly; but the duchess thinks differently, and has lost none of her confidence. She comports herself with unparalleled haughtiness and insolence towards her majesty, who shrinks from any encounter with her."

"Poor queen!" exclaimed Masham.

"Ay, poor queen, indeed!" echoed Abigail, with a sigh. "She well deserves your sympathy. Never was affection and kindness more unworthily requited than hers has been; never was good-nature more abused; never forbearance more presumed upon. But even her majesty's kindness may be

tried too hard, and that the tyrannical duchess will find out ere long."

"Why does not the queen free herself at once?" cried Masham. "Is she not absolute mistress here?"

"Absolute mistress in appearance, but not in reality," replied Abigail; "there is no person in this palace more dependent than its sovereign mistress. Her nature is so affectionate, that love with her is a necessity; and since the loss of all her children, there has been a void in her heart which she has sought to fill up with friendship. How she has been disappointed, you see. But the pang of sundering for ever old ties and old feelings is so great, that she shrinks from it. It is the kindness of the queen's heart that makes her irresolute. This the duchess knows, and takes advantage of. When matters become desperate

between them, she adroitly makes some slight concession, soothes the queen's wounded feelings, and all is right again. But if I can prevent it, the present difference shall not be healed."

"You are right," replied Masham; "your duty to the queen demands it. It is intolerable to see such excellence so greatly abused. But how stands Harley with her majesty?"

"His favour increases," replied Abigail. "He is admitted to frequent private conferences, and strenuously urges measures which he affirms would prove beneficial."

"Unfortunately, Harley has only the furtherance of his own schemes in view," observed Masham.

"So the queen suspects," rejoined Abigail; "and therefore she has not entire confidence in him. Poor lady! she is

sorely perplexed. She fears the duchess—doubts Harley—and distrusts herself. Ah!" she added, as the inner door slowly opened; "she comes."

Masham had scarcely time to draw back a few paces, when the queen, accompanied by Prince George of Denmark, entered the room.

"Ah! Abigail, I am glad to find you," said Anne. "I thought you long in returning. But what is the matter. You appear agitated."

"I have just received a letter, madam," replied Abigail, in some confusion.

"From Mr. Masham—ha?" said the queen. "Nay, I see it by your blushes. You need not be alarmed. I did not inhibit him from writing to you. Well, and where is he?"

"Pardon me, madam, I am not at liberty to tell you," replied Abigail.

"Well, I will not exert my prerogative, and enforce an answer," rejoined the queen. "Provided he obeys my injunctions, and absents himself from court, I am content."

"Heyday, who have we here?" cried Prince George;—"a strange face! Come hither, young man. Why don't you move, sirrah, when you're called? Zounds! is the fellow deaf?"

"You frighten him," said the queen, smiling good humouredly.

"What's the matter, sirrah?" cried the prince, stepping towards Masham.—"'Sdeath! how very like!—It must be——"

"Must be whom?" asked the queen, half turning round. "Who is he like?"

"One of the servants at Hampton Court," replied the prince, adroitly placing himself between her and Masham. "Your majesty recollects Tom Ottley? This young

man is the very image of Tom. Oh! you rascal! I've found you out," he added, in an undertone, and shaking his hand at the alarmed equerry.

"You have become very pale again, Abigail," said the queen to her. "You are certainly unwell."

"I shall be better presently," replied Abigail, in a faint voice.

"Your paleness increases!" cried the queen, in some alarm. "A chair!"

Masham immediately flew for one, but the prince took it from him, and carried it to Abigail, who sank into it.

"The salts!" exclaimed the queen; "there is a bottle on that table."

Masham rushed to obey her, and in the hurry knocked down a couple of China ornaments, which were broken in pieces upon the floor. Aghast at what he had

done, he stood irresolute, while the prince, darting an angry look at him, ran up, snatched the bottle of salts from his hand, and gave it to the queen.

"That is a very careless person," said Anne, making Abigail breathe at the salts. "What is his name?"

"Masham!" exclaimed Abigail, faintly.

"Masham!—nonsense!" exclaimed the prince. "Her thoughts are for ever running on her lover. The queen desires to know your name, sirrah?" he added, turning towards Masham, and winking at him. "How are you called—Tomkins or Wilkins, eh?"

"Neither, your highness," was the reply. "My name is Mezansene."

"Mezansene—ha!" rejoined the prince. "Well, then, Mr. Mezansene, I hope you'll be more careful in future. I rather liked your looks, and designed to keep you in

attendance chiefly on myself; but if you're so confoundedly heedless, I can't do it."

"I crave your highness's pardon," said Masham.

"Well—well, I'll overlook the first fault," rejoined the prince. "Come to my apartments in the evening. My apartments, you understand," he added, with a wink at Masham, who replied with a low bow.

"You look better now, child," said the queen, who had been lavish in her attentions to Abigail. "I hope you will have no recurrence of these attacks."

"I shall never have another, I am sure, gracious madam," replied Abigail, "if you will revoke your sentence on Mr. Masham."

"Do not press me on that point, Abigail," replied the queen. "I cannot do it. You had better retire to your own room. I am going to the library to Mr. Harley, who

desires an immediate audience with me. Come, prince, we have detained him long enough. Take care of yourself, child, and think no more of Mr. Masham, if you can help it."

Abigail passed into the inner room without hazarding a look at her lover, while he opened the door for the queen.

Prince George lingered behind for a moment, and said in his equerry's ear—"Confounded scrape you would have got into but for me. Take care you're not found out, or I shall come in for a share of the blame. Coming, your majesty!" And he added aloud—"Don't forget what I've told you, Masham—Mezansene, I mean! Deuce take it! I hope her majesty didn't overhear me."

And he hurried after the queen.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEREIN MARLBOROUGH AND GODOLPHIN DEMAND HARLEY'S DISMISSAL OF THE QUEEN.

SHORTLY after this, the queen and the prince entered the library, a large, lofty, well-proportioned room, constructed by Charles the Second, and slightly altered by William the Third. It had a semi-coved ceiling, with a deep, richly-moulded cornice, and the windows, which were square and formal, with heavy frameworks, and placed under round arches, supported by pilasters

lborough and Godolphin demanding Harleys dismissal of the Queen.

LONDON: JOHN MORTIMER, ADELAIDE STREET, 1844.

in the worst Italian taste, looked out into the gardens of the palace. Between the springings of each arch, on a pedestal, was set a bust; and there were numerous others disposed in different parts of the room. Well-filled bookcases projected from between the windows, so as to form charming nooks for reading: and the walls on the opposite side were covered with goodly tomes and maps. Throughout the palace, there was not a pleasanter retreat than the library.

Harley was expecting the queen with much impatience, and even exhibited it when she appeared. After returning his salutation, Anne seated herself at a small round table, on which writing materials were placed, and behind which stood a large japan screen, while the prince stationed himself beside her with his arm leaning on the back of her chair.

"The time is at length arrived, madam," said Harley, speaking hurriedly and energetically, "when some positive decision must be come to, and when either I and Saint-John, or Godolphin and Marlborough, must retire. It can be no longer averted. Positive assurance has been given me that at the cabinet council which, as your majesty is aware, has been summoned this morning, these lords will announce their intention of resigning, if I am not dismissed. It will therefore be a trial of strength; but if I am supported by your majesty, I can have no fear as to the result."

"I hope their threat will not be put into execution, sir," replied Anne, much alarmed at what she heard. "This is a most unfortunate juncture for a change of ministry."

"It must be avoided, if possible," said

Prince George, helping himself to a large pinch of snuff.

"There is no way of avoiding it," replied Harley. "The difficulty must be *met;* and I confess I have none of the apprehensions apparently entertained by her majesty. An outcry will no doubt be raised at first, but it will instantly subside. Marlborough's popularity has reached its climax—nay, is on the decline. The war in the Low Countries has been too long protracted; the public coffers have been too heavily drained by the vast supplies required, not to have opened the eyes of all thinking persons to the grievance; and they have begun to perceive, now that the dazzle of victory is over, that this most expensive pastime is only carried on to enrich the commander-in-chief himself. The Earl of Rochester, who will support the new administration,

threatens to inquire why the attack on France is ever made through the Netherlands, instead of through Spain, the principal object of the war, where our success might be double what it is, if we had a larger army than that commanded by the brave, though rash, Earl of Peterborough. Public feeling, moreover, is against the continuance of the war. We have bought our honours too dearly; and though the noisy mob may lose their idol, Marlborough, a new puppet can be bought for them, and at a less ruinous price. As to Lord Godolphin's resignation, with submission to your majesty, it will be scarcely felt, for it can be well supplied."

"By Mr. Harley?" said the prince, somewhat sarcastically.

"No, by a far better man, your highness," replied Harley—"by Lord Poulet.

I shall be well content to hold my present office, or any office in which I can effectively serve her majesty; but she has expressed a wish, in the event of a change, that I should take the chancellorship of the exchequer."

"With the real powers of government," muttered the prince.

"A Tory ministry can be instantly formed," continued Harley, "of which Lords Rochester, Nottingham, Haversham, and Dartmouth, may be members. All your majesty's favourite measures can then be carried. You will never again be thwarted, as you have been, so repeatedly, and so vexatiously, by the insolent and domineering Whigs."

"You promise fairly, sir," remarked Anne.

"I promise what I will perform, madam,"

replied Harley. "And I also promise your highness," he added to the prince, "an exemption from those sneers and censures with which your administration of the admiralty has been visited. Your highness owes the Tories some favour for a special service they have rendered you, to which I need not allude."

"I am not unforgetful for the handsome provision they have made for me in case of her dear majesty's demise before mine; but I trust I may never benefit by it, sir," replied the prince, with a low, and somewhat sarcastic bow. "I don't see how I can advise the queen to support you now. It is a very critical juncture; and the slightest error in judgment will be fraught with the most perilous consequences."

"At all events, her majesty will determine," replied Harley. "I have used every argument I think right with her."

"My inclinations are with you, undoubtedly," replied Anne.

"If such is really the case, gracious madam," replied Harley, bending the knee to her, "do not hesitate. Consult your own happiness—your own greatness. And do not forget that if Marlborough and Godolphin retire, the duchess retires likewise."

"Enough, sir," replied the queen. "You may rise. I have decided. I will support you."

"Take time to reflect—take time!" cried the prince.

"I *have* reflected," replied Anne. "Whatever the consequence may be, Mr. Harley shall have my support."

At this moment, an usher entered the library, and informed the queen that the Duke of Marlborough and Lord Godolphin

were without, and craved an instant audience of her. Anne looked significantly at Harley.

"I will retire," said the secretary. "It were better they did not know of this interview."

"You cannot retire without passing through the room where they are waiting," replied the queen.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed the prince. "Stay, I have it. Perhaps Mr. Harley would not object to step behind this screen?"

Harley signified his ready acquiescence, and as the usher withdrew, ensconced himself as directed. The next moment the usher returned, and announced the Duke of Marlborough and Lord Godolphin.

The commander-in-chief looked grave; and the gloom habitual to the countenance

of the lord-treasurer was now almost deepened to severity.

Godolphin's usual deportment, though destitute of haughtiness, was cold and repelling; and so averse was he to flattery, or to the show of it, that he almost resented common civility; while frankness, which passed with him for sincerity, obtained more credit than it deserved. His complexion was black, with thick beetling brows, which added to the sternness of his expression. He was somewhat below the middle size, of a spare frame, and though turned sixty, looked full of vigour, bodily as well as mentally. He seemed one of those men who are made to last. He was plainly attired in a snuff-coloured suit, and wore a black campaign wig that harmonized with his complexion.

Godolphin was one of the best, if not one

of the greatest prime-ministers ever possessed by this country. The exalted post which he filled so admirably had been modestly refused when proffered to him, and was forced upon his acceptance by Marlborough, who declared that he himself would not undertake the command of the army, unless Godolphin regulated the supplies. By this great master of finance the revenue was so much improved that, in spite of the debts of the nation, five per cent. interest was paid for money placed in the public funds; and so incorruptibly honest was he in the administration of the treasure confided to him, so utterly free from venality in the disposal of place, that, in spite of the most rigid economy in his own establishment, he quitted office little richer than he entered it. Neither would he ask for the retiring pension which had been promised him.

The customary salutations gone through, but more coldly and formally than usual, on both sides, Marlborough spoke.

"It is with infinite concern that the lord-treasurer and myself present ourselves before your majesty, to advise a course of conduct which we have reason to believe may prove at variance with your own inclinations. Nevertheless, it is our duty so to advise you, and we do not shrink from the task, however painful it may be to us. Of late, to our great grief, we have found that your majesty has withdrawn your confidence from your long-tried and most responsible advisers, and has bestowed it upon one, little worthy in any way of such distinction; while the person in question has been further favoured by frequent conferences with you, from which we have been utterly excluded. If we have been misinformed, your majesty will be pleased to say so."

"If your grace refers to Mr. Harley, I have certainly permitted him to visit me rather frequently," replied the queen, fanning herself impatiently.

"Our information was then correct," resumed Marlborough. "The admission made, we demand Mr. Harley's dismissal."

"Demand it?" echoed Anne. "But let that pass. On what grounds do you *demand* his dismissal?"

"On these, madam," replied Godolphin, coming forward. "By lending your countenance to so notorious an intriguer with France, you degrade your own cabinet, and lessen its power, while you increase the confidence of its opponents."

"You do not speak with your wonted calmness, my lord," observed the queen, with asperity. "Can it be jealousy that moves you so?"

"I had hoped that my long services would have saved me from such an unworthy imputation," replied Godolphin. "But if your majesty has forgotten my deserts, I have not forgotten the loyalty and devotion I owe you, and both prompt me to implore you not to commit the honour and security of your kingdom to this traitor. He will be as false to you as he has been to us."

"Though we have hitherto failed in bringing the matter home to Harley through his miserable creature, Greg," said Marlborough, "not a doubt can exist that he has betrayed the secrets of our cabinet to that of France; and I have yet stronger confirmation in these letters," tendering papers to the queen, "which were found upon the persons of two smugglers named Vallière and

Bera, who have just been arrested, and who were professedly employed by him to obtain intelligence on the French coast, while the actual nature of their service is thus proved, beyond all question. It is true that the correspondence has been so artfully contrived, that Harley may not be implicated by it; but his criminality is unquestionable. On these grounds it is, madam, as well as on the ground of his treachery to us, his colleagues, that we demand Mr. Harley's dismissal from your service."

"And if I should decline to comply with the demand—what then?" said the queen, agitating her fan more violently than before, while Harley, with his finger on his lips, peered from behind the screen, to watch the effect of this question on the duke.

"If, after what has been said, your majesty remains insensible to the prejudice

done you by this person, we can only lament your wilful blindness," replied Marlborough, firmly; "but we are bound to regard our own honour and reputation; and we hereby respectfully announce to you, that no consideration shall induce us to serve longer with one whom we hold unworthy of association with men of honour."

"The Duke of Marlborough has fully expressed my sentiments, madam," said Lord Godolphin.

"You will act upon the determination you have so *respectfully* announced, my lords, if you think proper," replied Anne, rising with dignity; "but I will *not* dismiss Mr. Harley."

"Will your majesty grant me a hearing?" interposed the prince.

"Not if your highness is about to support

their arguments," replied Anne, peremptorily.

"Bravo!" cried Harley to himself behind the screen. "All is won."

"Your majesty will then consider us as forced from your service," said Marlborough, in a firm, but mournful tone.

And bowing profoundly, he withdrew with Godolphin.

"How shall I thank your majesty?" cried Harley, stepping from behind the screen.

"I know not how I have got through it," said Anne, sinking into the chair. "My mind misgives me."

"And so does mine—terribly!" cried the prince. "You would not listen to me while there was yet time."

"You have acted nobly—courageously,

madam," said Harley. "But the blow must be followed up, to ensure a victory."

"True," replied Anne, rising; "and therefore let us attend the privy-council."

CHAPTER XX.

SHEWING HOW THE TABLES WERE TURNED UPON THE SECRETARY.

ONCE again, on that same day, Masham and Abigail met, and in the same place too. Ascertaining that the queen was engaged with the privy-council, the fair attendant took advantage of the opportunity that presented itself to return to the ante-room, where she was not without the hope of finding her lover, and where she in reality did find him.

Delightful was the interview that ensued, but it was unfortunately cut short, and at the tenderest point too, by the abrupt entrance of the queen and her consort. Anne was in a state of too great perturbation to notice Masham, who sprang backward as the door opened, and affected to be employed at one of the tables; but the prince shook his head at him, with a look that seemed to say—"You are resolved to be detected, you imprudent rascal!"

"What has happened, gracious madam?" cried Abigail, flying to the queen. "I thought you engaged with the privy-council."

"The council is broken up," replied the queen, hurriedly. "They met not to deliberate, but to dispute; and I therefore put a sudden termination to the meeting."

"I can guess the cause of the dispute,"

said Abigail. "The treasurer and the duke made their threatened attack on Mr. Harley?"

"Neither the duke nor the treasurer were there," replied the queen; "but you shall hear what occurred. I took my place as usual, — the whole of the council being assembled, with the exception of the two important members you have mentioned, for whose absence, however, I was prepared, and was therefore not surprised at it. After a brief pause, during which I observed the council eye each other significantly, I motioned Mr. Harley to open the business of the meeting. He obeyed; but had scarcely commenced, when he was interrupted by the Duke of Somerset, who arose, and exclaimed with great vehemence, 'It is a mockery to proceed further. We cannot deliberate when the two leaders of

the cabinet—persons by whose opinions we must be governed—are absent.' The duke had scarcely sat down, when the Earl of Sunderland arose, and said in a stern tone to Harley, 'I demand to know from Mr. Secretary why we are deprived of the attendance of the commander-in-chief and the lord-treasurer? When I parted with them both, an hour ago, I know it was their intention, under certain circumstances, to be present.'—'You have no right to put the question to me, my lord,' replied Mr. Harley, 'and I decline to answer it. But as you state that the duke and treasurer only meant to attend under 'certain circumstances,' perhaps you will state what those circumstances were?' —'The circumstances were these, sir,' the earl rejoined: 'they were about to signify to the queen that they would no longer

serve with you, whom they find have played them falsely; and, by their absence, I understand that her majesty has accepted their resignation. As their lordships will not serve with you, neither will I, nor will any of the council.' 'There you are wrong, my lord,' cried Mr. Saint-John, 'for *I* will. I will fearlessly and strenuously support her majesty's determination against all opposition.' Sir Thomas Mansell and Sir Simon Harcourt followed, to the same effect, all the rest siding with Sunderland; but so fierce a discussion commenced between the conflicting parties, and such opprobrious language was used towards Mr. Harley, and so little respect shewn to myself, that I broke up the meeting."

"Your majesty has therefore placed yourself entirely in the hands of Mr. Harley?" cried Abigail, joyfully.

"Entirely," replied the queen.

"Oh! how glad I am to hear it," cried Abigail, hazarding a side-look at Masham, who was listening attentively to the conversation. "Your majesty will now have some quiet."

"On the contrary, I am afraid all chance of quiet is at an end," cried the prince, heaving a deep sigh.

"I am expecting a visit from Mr. Harley, to advise what course is next to be pursued," said the queen. "Ha! here he is," she added, as the door opened. "No!" and her countenance fell; "it is the Duchess of Marlborough!"

"The duchess!" exclaimed the prince and Abigail together.

"I am unwelcome, and unexpected, I perceive," said the duchess, maintaining her imperious air and deportment, as she

advanced towards the queen. "No matter. I have that to say which *must* be said, and quickly. Before your majesty is finally and irretrievably committed to this step, you will do well to pause. At all events, I will shew you the dangerous position in which you stand. The rumour of the change of administration has spread with lightning swiftness. The coffee-houses are thronged with members of both houses of parliament, who have expressed their dissatisfaction in no measured terms, and the language they now hold will be repeated when they take their places to-night. Those of the commons declare that the bill of supply which was ordered for to-day shall be allowed to lie on the table unread. Already the news of the treasurer's resignation has reached the city, and stocks have fallen lower than they have ever been

known during your majesty's reign; while a meeting of the wealthiest merchants has been called to consider what is to be done in a crisis so alarming. As to the people, they are in a state of ferment. The precincts of the palace are surrounded by crowds, who are giving vent to their anger in hootings and groans."

"It is true, your majesty," cried the prince, looking out of the window; "the park is thronged with a vast mob, who appear in a very excited state. There! you may hear their shouts."

And as he spoke, distant groans were heard.

The duchess watched the queen's changing countenance with exultation. She read in it the impression she had produced.

"A popular tumult will ensue," she

cried; "and once begun, who shall say where it will end?"

"It is a plot!" cried the queen, enraged and alarmed. "I will not be intimidated!"

"Your majesty had better listen to reason," remarked the prince. "Mr. Harley may find these difficulties unsurmountable."

"Mr. Harley cannot carry on the government, as her majesty will find," said the duchess. "Hated by the Whigs, distrusted by the Tories, he will neither have the confidence of the one party, nor the support of the other; while, labouring as he does under the grave suspicion of trafficking with France, his instant dismissal will be called for by the voice of the whole nation. So circumstanced, he cannot stand for a day; and her majesty will have to

bear all the fearful consequences of the attempt, with the disgrace of failure."

"Your majesty had better reconsider your opinion," urged the prince.

"There is no time to reconsider it," said the duchess. "An instant decision must be made. There is but one way of dispersing those crowds, and of appeasing the popular indignation."

"And that way I will not adopt," replied Anne, firmly. "I have promised to support Mr. Harley; and as long as he chooses to persevere, I will uphold him."

"Worthily resolved, madam," cried Abigail.

"Peace, wench! and deliver your opinion when it is asked," cried the duchess, coarsely. "I take my leave of your majesty. To-morrow, it will be your turn to come to me."

She then moved towards the door, but her departure was checked by the sudden entrance of Harley. His looks bespoke agitation and alarm.

"She here!" he muttered. "I hoped to have anticipated her. But no matter. Stay, duchess," he added, aloud, "you may wish to hear what I have to say to her majesty. Madam," he continued, throwing himself at the queen's feet, "I humbly thank you for the trust you have been graciously pleased to repose in me; but with the most ardent desire to serve you, and to carry out your designs, I am unable to do so."

"He confesses his incompetency!" exclaimed the duchess, triumphantly. "I knew he would be compelled to do so."

"The friends on whom I relied have fallen from me——" pursued Harley.

"It is needless to proceed, sir," interrupted the duchess. "I have already shewn her majesty the utter incapacity of the persons to whom she thought fit to entrust the affairs of her kingdom."

"I hope you have also shewn her majesty that our inability arises chiefly, if not wholly, from your machinations, duchess," replied Harley. "It is with inexpressible concern that I am compelled to tender my resignation to your majesty."

"Resign before he has ever held office!" cried the duchess, derisively. "A capital jest—ha! ha! So ends this farce."

"My friends, Saint-John, Mansell, and Harcourt, retire with me," continued Harley.

"Cholmondeley, Walpole, and Montagu shall have their places," muttered the duchess.

"I accept your resignation with as much

regret as you tender it, Mr. Harley," said the queen; "but though I lose your services, you shall not lose my favour. Duchess, as you have excited this tumult, you will now perhaps take means to allay it."

"Your majesty's happy decision needs but to be publicly announced to change those demonstrations of discontent into rejoicings," replied the duchess. "I will set about it immediately. Poor ex-secretary! He resembles his slippery namesake, Harleyquin, when robbed of his wand by Scaramouch."

"A sorry jest!" exclaimed Abigail—"and ungenerous as sorry."

"If your majesty desires to propitiate the friends you have deserted, and have been obliged to recal, you will dis-

charge your forward attendant," cried the duchess.

"Whatever happens, duchess, Abigail will remain with me," replied the queen with dignity.

"Your majesty has seen how ineffectual your resolutions are," rejoined the duchess, sarcastically. "Again I take my leave."

"To the door, Masham!" cried the prince.

"Masham!" exclaimed the duchess, looking round; "I thought he was banished."

"I meant Mezansene," replied the prince, in some embarrassment. "Deuce take my unlucky tongue!"

"There is something in this," muttered the duchess. "That young man is very like Masham. I go to execute your ma-

jesty's behests." And making a profound obeisance, she withdrew.

"I am now nothing more than your majesty's servant," observed Harley.

"You are no longer my minister," returned the queen; "but you are as much my friend—my adviser—as ever."

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

SAINT JAMES'S:

OR,

THE COURT OF QUEEN ANNE.

Book the Second.

ABIGAIL HILL.

CHAPTER I.

OF MASHAM'S PLAN TO DECEIVE THE DUCHESS, AND OF ITS SUCCESS.

THE downfal of Harley, and the resignation of his friends, necessarily increased the ascendancy of the Whigs, and placed the Duchess of Marlborough in a position of greater importance than ever, causing her to be regarded, and with reason, as the sole arbitress of affairs. The contest on this occasion not having been so much a struggle between two conflicting parties, as

a trial of strength between the queen and her former favourite, and having resulted in the triumph of the latter, seemed to afford decisive proof of her superior power. "Queen Sarah," as she was commonly styled, by friend as well as foe, was therefore said to have deposed Queen Anne.

But the duchess, though she might well be confident, was not deluded into fancied security. On the contrary, she redoubled her vigilance; strengthened her position as much as possible; and made every effort compatible with her haughty nature to conciliate the queen, and regain her affections.

But Anne was not to be won back. Mortification at the defeat she had endured made her regard her conqueror with positive aversion; and though she masked the feeling carefully during their intercourse, it did not require the penetration of the duchess

to discover the true light in which she was now regarded.

The grand subject of uneasiness, however, to the duchess, was Abigail's increasing favour, and her own inability to procure her removal. On this point the queen remained inflexible. Neither remonstrance nor entreaty could shake her constancy to her favourite, and even when told that an address would be presented to her by the House of Commons, requiring Abigail's dismissal, she treated the menace with disdain.

Equally disinclined, also, did she shew herself to put a stop to her conferences with Harley, who was admitted to as frequent audiences as heretofore, and the nature of whose councils soon became apparent in her own mode of conduct. While this great master

of intrigue had such constant access to the queen's ear, and while another than herself enjoyed her confidence, the duchess, in the midst of all her triumph, felt ill at ease, and apprehensive of an ultimate overthrow. Cost what it might, therefore, the root of these annoyances must be eradicated, and while debating within herself how to execute her purpose, chance seemed to throw the means of its accomplishment in her way.

It may be remembered that, at the close of a recent interview with the queen, owing to the inadvertence of Prince George of Denmark, the duchess had well-nigh detected Masham's disguise; and though she had repeatedly since that time tried to discover him among the servants, he had managed, by extreme caution, to elude her notice, until one day she met him face to face in the great gallery. Retreat being out of the

question, Masham, though filled with confusion, was obliged to brook her scrutiny, and the duchess, after regarding him steadfastly for a few moments, dropped him a profound curtsey, saying, in a tone of bitter raillery, "Accept my congratulations on your advancement, Mr. Masham. I was not aware you had entered her majesty's household."

"Your grace is mistaken," he stammered, in reply. "My name is Mezansene."

"Mezansene!—ha! ha!" laughed the duchess. "How long have you possessed that name, sir?—ever since your banishment from court, I suppose. We shall see whether her majesty knows who she has got in her service. If she is ignorant of the fact, Abigail, I'll be bound, is not. Adieu, Mr. Mezansene—since that's the name you choose to go by—ha! ha!" And with a

bow of mock ceremoniousness, she passed towards the royal apartments.

Confounded at what had occurred, Masham stood for some moments irresolute. Persuaded, if the duchess put her threat into execution, and betrayed him to the queen, as he could not doubt she would, that all chance of an union with Abigail Hill would be at an end, and their future prospects blighted, he weighed over every means of avoiding the threatened danger.

After turning over various expedients in his mind, he bethought him of a yeoman of the guard, named Snell, with whom, since he had been forced to consort to a certain degree with the household, he had struck up a kind of intimacy. Snell was a good-looking young fellow, about the same height as himself, not unlike him in features, and might be made, he thought, to pass for him

without difficulty. Accordingly, he hurried off to the guard-room in search of him, when, by good luck, he met him coming up the great staircase on his way to the ante-chamber.

Without pausing to explain his motives, except to say that he wanted to speak to him particularly, Masham seized his acquaintance by the arm, and dragging him quickly along a passage or two, and up a short staircase, pulled him into a small chamber, and closed the door.

"What in the name o' wonder is the meanin' of all this?" asked Snell, almost out of breath.

"It means that we must change dresses —quick!" replied Masham.

"Change dresses!—are you mad?" demanded Snell.

"Not so mad but I can give you a sound

and substantial reason for compliance," rejoined Masham. "This purse," tossing him one full of gold, "will speak for my sanity."

"It may speak for your sanity better than your honesty, Master Mezansene," replied Snell, chinking the purse. "How did you come by it?"

"Fairly enough, that's all you need know," replied Masham. "But come, be quick! Each instant is precious." And he began to throw off his own habiliments.

"I'm afraid I shall get into some confounded scrape if I consent," hesitated Snell.

"Tut!" cried Masham. "You've nothing to do but personate me for a few minutes. You can easily do that, you know."

"You're sure there's no treason intended —no popery?" rejoined Snell, taking off his scarlet doublet.

"Treason! — a fiddlestick!" answered Masham, snatching the garment from him.

"And it can't be construed into a hangin' matter?" pursued Snell, as he divested himself of his crimson hose, and black velvet uppers.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Masham, arraying himself in the attire in question. "Recollect that you're me; and whoever questions you, be it the queen herself, be sure and say that your name is Mezansene. Stick to that, and all will be right."

"The queen!" echoed Snell. "If you think there's any chance of her majesty addressin' me, I'd rather not undertake it."

"It's too late now," replied Masham, who by this time was fully equipped in the other's clothes. "Besides, there's nothing to be afraid of," he said, clapping on the yeoman's little round black velvet cap,

ornamented with roses, and taking possession of his halbert; "nothing at all."

He then helped his companion to complete his metamorphosis, which done, Snell looked so like the ci-devant Mezansene, that the other could not help laughing at the resemblance. Speedily checking his merriment, however, he bade the new-made lacquey follow him, and descending the staircase, hurried towards the ante-room, where he indicated to Snell the post he must occupy, while he stationed himself outside an open door, communicating with the gallery.

Snell was in a great flutter, wondering what would happen next, when Prince George of Denmark suddenly issued from the royal apartments, and made towards him with a quick step and mysterious air. The poor fellow turned away his head, and

affected to be looking for something on the floor.

"I knew how it would be!" exclaimed the prince. "The duchess has found you out, and has told the queen."

"Told the queen what, your highness?" stammered Snell, not daring to look up.

"Why, who you are, to be sure," rejoined the prince. "What else had she to tell, eh? I slipped away to warn you. Well, what do you mean to do now?"

"I'm sure I don't know, your highness," answered Snell, in great trepidation.

"Imbecile!" cried the prince, angrily. "You've got yourself into a terrible scrape, and must get out of it as well as you can."

Snell groaned aloud.

"One consequence of your indiscretion will be Abigail's loss of her post, I fear," pursued the prince.

"I don't mind what she loses, provided I get off," cried Snell.

"Eh, what? I can't have heard aright, surely," exclaimed the prince. "You don't mind what Abigail loses? Perhaps you don't mind what becomes of her?"

"No, I don't," replied Snell.

"'Sdeath! what have you ventured here for, then?" cried the prince, in a towering passion. "Why did you put on this dress?"

"I'm sorry I ever did so," rejoined Snell. "I was a fool for my pains."

"More craven than fool, I begin to think," said the prince, his anger changing to disgust. "Why, you poor-spirited fellow, you don't deserve a lady's regard. You are not the man I took you for."

"I am not, indeed, your highness," responded Snell.

"You have adopted the soul of a footman as well as the clothes," pursued the prince, impetuously. "I came here to help you, but I'm so thoroughly disgusted, that I cast you off for ever. I wish her majesty would hang you; and if she takes my advice, she will do so."

"Oh, don't say so, your highness!" roared Snell, dropping on his knees. "Pardon me this once, and I'll never offend again."

"Why, what the deuce is this?" cried the prince. "This is not Masham! Some new trickery—eh? Where's your confederate, sirrah?"

"Here, your highness," replied the young equerry, advancing from the door.

"What, in a new disguise?" cried the prince.

"I've changed dresses with this young

man, for the purpose of imposing upon the duchess," replied Masham.

"Faith, a good idea, if it can only be carried out," replied the prince, laughing. "But I'm afraid this fellow's stupidity will ruin the scheme. I'll try and frighten him into attention. Hark'ee, sirrah," he added to Snell, "you're in a very awkward predicament — very awkward, indeed. Your only chance of escape lies in discretion."

"I'll do everything your highness directs," replied Snell.

"Get up, then, sirrah," rejoined the prince; "put on a bold countenance; and, as you value your neck, don't leave this spot. I must now go," he added, in a low tone to Masham, "for if I'm found here it may excite suspicion." So saying, he passed on towards the gallery, and Masham returned to his post.

Little time was allowed Snell for consideration. The prince had scarcely disappeared, when the inner door again opened, and gave admittance to Abigail.

"Oh! you are here!" she exclaimed, quickly. "Your disguise has been discovered. Fly as fast as you can!"

"I would gladly do so," replied Snell, averting his face, "but I dare not."

"Dare not!" exclaimed Abigail. "You must. The queen and the duchess will be here instantly, and then we are both lost."

"The prince has just been here, and has ordered me not to stir," replied Snell.

"You had better risk disobeying him than incur the queen's displeasure, aggravated as it is by the duchess's malice," said Abigail. "If you are found here, all chance of our union is at an end."

"Our union!" thought Snell to himself.

"This explains it. The rascal has been making love to the queen's favourite! It'll be counted high treason, at the least. I shall be beheaded, and no one will find out the mistake till it's too late. Oh, Lord!—oh, Lord!"

"Don't stand talking to yourself in that way," cried Abigail, "but go. You seem to have taken leave of your senses."

"I believe I have," cried Snell, slapping his forehead, and stamping on the floor, in a distracted manner. "My brain spins round like a top. Would to Heaven I had never entered the palace!"

"These regrets are not very flattering to me," replied Abigail. "But I will not reproach you. They are coming! Fly! fly!"

"I dare not, I tell you," rejoined Snell. "The prince said it was as much as my head was worth to leave this place."

"Your conduct is utterly incomprehensible," said Abigail, in a tone of mingled anxiety and vexation. "You seem determined to ruin us both, and exhibit such unaccountable waywardness and selfishness, that I begin to regret having wasted my affection upon you."

"I wish you never had so wasted it," said Snell.

"How!" exclaimed Abigail, in extremity of surprise and indignation.

"That is, not upon me, but upon him," rejoined the other.

"Him!" she cried. "Whom do you allude to, sir?"

"To—to—to—I don't exactly know his name," he replied.

"This is unpardonable," she cried, "and at such a moment, too! But it reconciles me to the discovery. Farewell for ever, sir.

I leave you to make your own excuses to the queen. Even if she forgives you, I will not."

"What have I done, madam?" cried Snell, falling on his knees before her, and catching hold of her dress—"what new mischief have I committed?"

"It is idle to ask the question," replied Abigail, trying to extricate herself from him. "Get up—release me!—I hear them coming!"

But before she could free herself from him, the door opened, and the queen and the Duchess of Marlborough entered the ante-chamber.

"There!" cried the duchess, pointing triumphantly to Snell, whose back was towards them, and who still remained in a kneeling posture—"behold the confirmation of my statement. Thus it is that your

majesty's injunctions are fulfilled. Thus it is that you are betrayed by those in whom you place implicit confidence. After this proof of treachery and disobedience, you cannot hesitate to drive Abigail from your presence for ever."

"You are hasty, duchess," replied Anne, coldly. "This scene may admit of some explanation."

"Explanation!" echoed the duchess, with a contemptuous laugh. "It can admit of no explanation but one. Your majesty, I presume, will not doubt the evidence of your own eyesight?"

"Can this be Mr. Masham?" said the queen. "I am by no means satisfied on the point."

"Her grace is labouring under a most extraordinary delusion," replied Prince George, who was standing near the door

with his disguised equerry, laughing at what was occurring. "This person is Mezansene, one of the attendants whom, as your majesty knows, I have lately taken into my service. Let her look at him more closely, and she will instantly perceive her mistake."

"Why, I declare it is not Masham!" cried Abigail to herself, and recoiling in confusion from her supposed lover. "Have I been deceived all this time!"

"It is your highness who is labouring under a delusion, not me," said the duchess. "I affirm that *is* Mr. Masham."

"No, your grace, I'm not Mr. Masham, indeed I ain't!" roared Snell.

"It's not his voice, certainly," cried the duchess, starting forward, and gazing at him in consternation. "This is not the person I met in the gallery."

"Yes it is, your grace, for he has just told me all about it," interposed the prince. "The mistake was very natural, for he is uncommonly like Masham—so like that I frequently call him by the name. Don't I, sirrah?"

"Very frequently, your highness," replied Snell.

"Confusion!" exclaimed the duchess. But instantly recovering herself, she turned to Abigail and said, "Since this is not Mr. Masham, how came he on his knees to you? It is not usual for lacqueys to adopt such a posture to ladies."

"He had a favour to beg from her, of course?" said the prince.

"Yes, I had a favour to beg of her," added Snell.

"Ah, indeed; what was it?" asked the duchess.

"Nay, that's pressing the poor fellow too hardly, duchess," rejoined the prince.

"Pardon me, your highness," replied the duchess, "the whole affair is so mysterious and unsatisfactory, that I shall not rest till I have sifted it thoroughly. Hark'ee, sirrah; as you aver that you met me in the gallery just now, you can of course tell what passed on that occasion. I see you are about to utter a lie. Confess your imposture at once, or you shall be soundly horsewhipped."

"Take care of your neck!" whispered the prince, significantly.

"Speak, fellow!" thundered the duchess.

"Really, your grace quite bewilders me," replied Snell.

"I don't wonder at it," observed the prince; "her grace bewilders most people."

"Are you known to any of the household, knave?" demanded the duchess.

"Yes, to a great many," answered Snell; "that is, I was known—" he added, checking himself in confusion.

"I doubt it," rejoined the duchess. "With your majesty's permission, I should like to have some one brought in to identify him."

The queen signified her assent, and the prince, with a covert wink at Masham, told him to fetch some member of the household.

"It's all up with me now!" muttered Snell, groaning internally.

At this juncture, the duchess moved towards the queen, and the prince, seeing her attention occupied, seized the opportunity of whispering a few words to Abigail, which seemed to set her quite at ease, for her face was lighted up with smiles.

The next moment, Masham returned with Proddy. The coachman was dressed in his state livery, and made one of his best and profoundest bows to the queen—another to the prince—and a third to the duchess.

"Step this way, Mr. Proddy," said the latter. "Do you know this person?" pointing to Snell.

"Perfectly well, your grace," replied Proddy. "Perfectly."

"To be sure he does," cried Snell, leaping up joyfully. "I was certain, Mr. Proddy would recollect his old friend——"

"Frank Mezansene," interrupted the coachman, seeing the mistake he was about to commit. "Yes—yes—I recollect you well enough, Frank. I knew him long before he came to the palace, your grace."

"Yes; Mr. Proddy knew me long before I dreamed of becoming a—a—a—yes—"

"A member of her majesty's household," supplied Proddy. "You owe your advancement to me; for if it hadn't been for my recommendation, Mr. Chillingworth wouldn't have engaged you as his substitute."

"Mr. Chillingworth! Mr. Masham, you mean," said Snell.

"No I don't," replied Proddy, significantly. "And you don't either, but you're so confused you don't know what you're sayin'."

"This is a plot, I'm convinced," cried the duchess. "Come, I'll make it worth your while to speak the truth, sirrah," she added to Snell. "You shall have the queen's free pardon, and a reward from me,

if you'll confess that you have been put up to this scheme by Mr. Masham."

"Nay, your grace is offering the poor fellow a bribe to forswear himself," said the prince. "Speak at the peril of your life!" he added, in an undertone, to Snell.

"I'm dumb," he replied.

There was a pause, but as Snell remained silent, the duchess turned to the queen, and said—"I pray your majesty let him be detained in close custody, till I have investigated the matter further."

"As your grace pleases," replied the queen; "but it appears unnecessary."

"Remove him!" cried the duchess to Masham.

The supposed yeoman of the guard bowed, and laid his hand on Snell. The latter trembled, and would have spoken, but was silenced by a look from the prince.

He was then hurried out of the room by Masham and Proddy.

"So ends your grace's discovery," said the queen, ironically.

"Pardon me, your majesty," replied the duchess; "it is not ended yet. Only promise me that if I lay bare this plot you will punish the contrivers as they deserve."

"The plot exists only in her grace's imagination," remarked the prince, laughing. "But apropos of Masham—I wish we had him again."

"I dare say your highness could produce him at a moment's notice," replied the duchess.

"I wish I could," replied the prince.

"Enough of this," interposed the queen. "Mr. Masham must abide his time. If he

appears before the expiration of his sentence, he will incur my displeasure anew."

"I am glad to hear your majesty say so," replied the duchess. "But I wish to confer with you on some other matters, and with your permission we will return to the cabinet."

The queen assented, and they passed into the inner room together.

"How can I thank your highness sufficiently?" cried Abigail, as she lingered behind with the prince. "Without your aid, all must have been discovered."

"'Gad, you've had a narrow escape, it must be confessed," cried the prince, laughing. "But I have thought of a new surprise for the duchess. I can't stop to tell you what it is, for no time must be lost. Follow them to the cabinet, or suspicion may be excited. I'll join you there pre-

sently, and perhaps you may see Masham again—ha! ha! Get along with you."

And he hurried through one door, as Abigail disappeared through the other.

CHAPTER II.

DETAILING THE FURTHER MYSTIFICATION OF THE DUCHESS.

SNELL, meanwhile, was conducted by Masham and Proddy to a closet adjoining the gallery, where the former, having given him some directions and assurances, which restored him, in a measure, to confidence, locked the door upon him.

This done, Proddy took his departure, and the young equerry was setting off in a different direction, when he saw the prince coming towards him. A few words passed

between them, at the end of which the prince, having placed a letter in the other's hand, they separated—his highness retracing his steps, and Masham hurrying to his own room.

Shortly afterwards, Masham returned to the closet, wrapped in a loose great coat, and, unlocking the door, entered, and found Snell divested of his attire. Taking a bundle from beneath his great coat, and throwing it to the other, Masham said—

"Here are your own clothes. As soon as you are dressed, come forth again, and take your post at the door. Lock it; act as I have directed; and I will double the reward I have given you."

Snell promised compliance, and Masham, snatching up his own habiliments, which had been tied up in a handkerchief by the other, disappeared.

Half-an-hour after this, and just as the duchess was taking leave of the queen, an usher entered the cabinet, and announced that the Duke of Marlborough begged a moment's audience of her majesty. Anne signified her assent, and Abigail, who with the prince was present, would have retired, but at a sign from her royal mistress, she remained.

The next moment, the duke was introduced. The duchess regarded him with surprise, and plainly expressed by her looks that the visit was wholly unexpected by her.

"I have come to ascertain your majesty's pleasure on a point on which I myself am somewhat doubtful," said the duke; "though I cannot but think you will adopt the course which appears to me most consistent with your character for good-nature."

"A strange preamble, my lord," replied Anne; "to what does it lead?"

"Ay, what does it lead to?" interposed the duchess, impatiently. "To the point, your grace."

"Briefly, then," replied the duke, "I have come here on behalf of Mr. Masham, who is just arrived from Paris——"

"Masham again!" interrupted the duchess, "he haunts us. We know not where Mr. Masham has arrived from; but he has been seen here,—in the palace,—not an hour ago."

"Impossible!" replied the duke; "he has only reached London within this half hour. He came straight to Marlborough House, and I saw him not five minutes after he quitted the saddle. His attire bore evidence of the expedition he had used."

"You hear that, duchess?" said the

prince, who seemed in a high state of enjoyment at what was going forward.

"He is the bearer of an important letter, which he has been enjoined to place in your majesty's own hands, and no other," pursued the duke, "and he came to consult me as to the course he should pursue, being still under sentence of banishment from your presence. As I have said, I scarcely knew how to advise him, but I consented to come hither to ascertain your pleasure."

"You did wrong!" cried the duchess, harshly.

"I am of a different opinion," rejoined the queen. "Under the circumstances, I *will* see him."

"He is without," replied the duke; "I thought it better to bring him with me."

Bowing to the queen, the duke withdrew, and the next moment returned with Masham.

The dusty riding-dress of the latter, his mud-bespattered boots, soiled cravat, and jaded appearance, perfectly bore out the notion of his having just arrived from a long and fatiguing journey.

Abigail was lost in astonishment, and could scarcely believe her eyes; the duchess was disconcerted; and Prince George nearly choked himself between suppressed laughter and large pinches of snuff.

"This is not a fitting attire to present myself in to your majesty," said Masham, with a profound obeisance to the queen; "but I have not had time to repair my toilette; beside——"

"I know what you would say, sir," interrupted the queen, good-humouredly. "You feared to gain admittance to my presence. But do not distress yourself. The necessity of the case excuses the want of

etiquette, as well as the violation of my injunctions. His grace of Marlborough tells me you have a dispatch for me, which can be delivered to no hands but mine."

"Here it is, madam," replied Masham, offering a letter to her.

"From France, sir?" she asked.

"From France, your majesty," replied Masham.

Before breaking the seal the queen glanced at it, and an almost imperceptible smile dwelt upon her lips; but it speedily faded away, and gave place to a totally different expression as she opened the letter, and scanned its contents.

"You have ill news there, I fear, madam?" said the duchess, after a pause.

"In truth, not very good," replied the queen. "My rash brother has, at length, prevailed upon the king of France to aid

him in an invasion of this country, and he calls upon me, as a means of preventing bloodshed, to surrender my crown to him."

"Surrender the crown to *him!*" exclaimed the duchess. "Vanity must have turned his brain. But is the letter from the Pretender himself?"

"It is from my brother," replied the queen.

"The Pretender is no brother of your majesty's, though he passes for such," rejoined the duchess. "We, who are acquainted with the warming-pan history, know better. If the letter is from him, how came it to be entrusted to Mr. Masham? Is he in the Jacobite interest?"

"Assuredly not," replied Masham. "I am prepared to lay down my life in her majesty's service; and in case of a rebellion I shall be found among the first to

rally round the throne. But I crave your majesty's pardon for remaining here without licence. Having discharged my mission, I take my leave."

And with a profound obeisance, he retired.

"The letter which your majesty has received contains no idle threat," said Marlborough. "I have just heard, from a source on which I can rely, that an expedition is fitting out at Dunkirk, the command of which is to be taken by the Chevalier de Forbin, a naval officer of great experience and bravery, while it will be accompanied by the Chevalier de Saint George in person."

"This sounds like preparation," said the queen.

"Prompt and effectual measures shall be taken to check it," replied the duke. "I

will instruct General Cadogan to obtain assistance from the Dutch government, and with whatever amount of men the French fleet may sail, a corresponding number of battalions shall be transported hither at the same time. The chief aim of the invasion will, doubtless, be Scotland. Several regiments of infantry must therefore be sent to join Lord Leven, the commander-in-chief in that country, who shall have instructions to take possession of Edinburgh Castle. The troops on the north-east coast of Ireland must be held ready for instant embarkation; and with regard to naval defence, if I may be permitted to recommend to the prince, I would suggest that a powerful squadron, under the command of Admiral Sir George Byng, should be sent to lie off Dunkirk, in order to watch the movements of the French fleet."

"It shall be so," replied the Prince. "The Lisbon fleet requires a large convoy, which the enemy no doubt calculated upon, and fancied that our shores would be left defenceless; but we will disappoint them. The squadron shall be sent, as your grace suggests."

"These precautions taken, nothing is to be feared," said the duke. "The attempted invasion will only redound to your majesty's glory, by proving the zeal and devotion of your subjects. Neither will it, as is hoped and intended by the crafty Louis, interfere with the prosecution of the war with France."

"Amen!" exclaimed the queen. "I must now break up the audience, for I am somewhat fatigued, and desire to commune with myself on these unpleasant tidings."

"Before it is broken up, I should wish

your majesty to see the prisoner once more," said the duchess.

"It is scarcely necessary," replied the queen, reluctantly; "but if your grace desire it——"

"I *do* desire it," replied the duchess.

"Well, then, let him be brought hither at once," said the queen; "but I warn your grace, that whatever occurs it will make no change in my disposition towards him!"

"In that case, let us bring the matter to an instant issue," said the prince.

Accordingly, an usher was despatched for the prisoner, and he returned shortly afterwards, followed by Snell and Masham —the former in his own garb of a yeoman of the guard, and the latter in the footman's disguise.

"Come this way," cried the prince.

And the pair stood before the queen.

"This young man bears a most remarkable resemblance to Mr. Masham," said the duke. "If I did not know that he had just left us, I should declare that it was him."

"The resemblance is indeed wonderful," said the prince.

"So wonderful that I am convinced it is him!" said the duchess.

"Mr. Masham has just quitted the palace, your grace," replied Snell.

"Oh, yes, I saw him pass the outer court," said the usher.

"Then nothing more need be said," remarked the duchess, "and your majesty will dismiss the prisoner. There has been some trickery in the matter, but what it is I cannot make out at present."

At a gesture from the queen, Snell with-

drew with Masham. The others retired soon after, leaving the queen and the prince alone. Anne looked hard at her husband, tapped her fan against her left hand, and shook her head significantly, while Prince George, not knowing exactly what all these expressive gestures meant, relieved his embarrassment by an immoderate pinch of snuff.

"You think you have made me your dupe," said the queen, at length, in a good-humoured tone—"but you are mistaken—I see through it all, and much more plainly than the duchess."

"Your majesty——"

"Nay, if you try to brave it out, I shall indeed be angry," interrupted Anne. "This letter came from France, no doubt—but it was under cover to you; and in making it

up again, you have used your own seal. Nay, look. Oh, prince! you are but a poor contriver!"

Her consort took another pinch of snuff.

"This is not all," pursued the queen. "In the folds of the letter there was slipped accidentally, no doubt—a billet from Abigail to Masham, from which I find he has been in the palace all the time, in disguise. Look at it." And she held forth a little note to him.

The prince again had recourse to his snuff-box.

"If your majesty punishes them, you must punish me," he said, "for I am equally to blame. But you will be gracious towards them?"

"I make no promises," she replied. "But I must defer all consideration of this foolish pair of lovers to some other occasion. You

must now help me to think over this meditated invasion, and the steps necessary to meet it. Oh, my brother!" she exclaimed —"would there were any way of helping thee, short of surrendering my crown!"

CHAPTER III.

WHEREIN THE SERJEANT RECEIVES AN IMPORTANT COMMISSION FROM THE DUKE.

On returning from the palace, the Duke of Marlborough retired to his closet, and sent for Serjeant Scales. The serjeant was not long in answering the summons; but he entered so noiselessly, that the duke, who was busily engaged in writing, did not perceive him, and he remained standing motionless and erect for some time, until, chancing to raise his eyes, the duke remarked his presence.

"Oh, you are there, serjeant," he said. "I sent for you to let you know that you will have to sail for Holland to-night,—or rather, early to-morrow morning; for the sloop in which you will take your passage, and which is lying off Woolwich, will set out with the tide, at three o'clock. You must be on board by midnight."

"Good, general," replied Scales, saluting.

"The object of your sudden departure is this," pursued the duke. "Despatches will be entrusted to your care, which you will deliver with your own hand to General Cadogan, at the Hague—with your own hand, mind, serjeant. The general may be at Hellevoetsluys, or elsewhere; for though he has just written to me from Ostend, to say he should take his departure immediately for the Dutch capital, circumstances

may alter his route. But you will learn where he is when you reach Briel."

"Very good, general," replied the serjeant. "It shall be done."

Upon this, the duke nodded his head, and resumed his writing; but looking up after awhile, he found Scales still in the same place.

"What, not gone, serjeant?" he said.

"I didn't understand I was done with," replied Scales, saluting, and moving towards the door.

"Stay," replied the duke, noticing a certain hesitation in his follower's manner. "Can I do anything for you before you go? Don't be afraid to ask, if I can."

"I want nothing, your grace," replied Scales, "but what I can't have."

"How do you know that, unless you

make the experiment?" replied the duke, kindly.

"Because the errand on which I'm going tells me so," replied the serjeant. "What I want is your grace's company. I don't like leaving you behind."

"Would I *were* going with you, my good fellow!" exclaimed the duke. "I would far rather undergo all the anxieties and fatigues of the most difficult campaign than take part, as I am now obliged to do, in the petty cabals and intrigues of a court. But I am not my own master, as indeed no man is who has sold himself to his country. Content you, serjeant, I shall follow you speedily."

"And who is to clean your grace's boots when I am gone?" said Scales, in a doleful tone, and with a grimace well calculated to provoke the duke's laughter.

"Really, serjeant, I have not given that important matter consideration," said Marlborough, smiling. But fearful of hurting the other's feelings, he added, in a kindly tone, "I shall certainly miss your skilful brush."

"Your grace won't look like yourself without me," said the serjeant, who, being a privileged favourite, indulged in considerable familiarity. "The boots won't take the right polish from any hand but mine. Your grace may laugh; but it's true. You've often admitted it before, and you'll admit it again."

"Very likely, serjeant," replied the duke. "You've many excellent qualities besides a talent for cleaning boots; and I shall be sorry to lose you, even for a short time. Nor would I employ you upon the present

commission, but that I know no one so trustworthy as yourself."

"Your grace will never have reason to repent your confidence," replied Scales, proudly.

"I believe you, my good fellow," returned the duke. "I believe you."

"Oh, general!" exclaimed Scales, "how happy shall we be in retirement at Blenheim, after a few more glorious campaigns, when we come to turn our swords into ploughshares."

"That is what I sigh for, indeed, serjeant," replied the duke; "but it will never happen. I have a presentiment that the fruits of my labour will be snatched from me at the moment of maturity. Louis will accomplish by gold what he cannot achieve by force of arms. There is a faction here at

work to oppose all my efforts, and in time they may succeed in neutralizing them. What I gain in the field is lost at court, for there, strange to say, the King of France has a stronger party than I have. Repeated defeats have shewn him we are destined to be his conquerors, and he therefore seeks to retrieve his losses by other means. If he succeeds in obtaining peace on his own terms, it were better the war had never been undertaken—better so much treasure had never been uselessly spent, and so many lives lost—better, far better, Blenheim and Ramilies had never been won."

"It pains me to hear your grace talk thus," rejoined Scales; "but such a disgraceful peace will never be made."

"Heaven grant I may never live to see the day!" cried the duke, "but I fear it. The seeds of treason are scattered so widely

throughout this court, that, unless discovered and plucked forth, they will produce a terrible harvest. However, though entertaining this feeling, I do not suffer myself to be disheartened by it, but shall go on as energetically as ever; and as long as the armies of England are entrusted to my command, her laurels shall never be tarnished."

"No fear of that, your grace," said Scales, emphatically.

"The French never have won a battle from me yet, and they never shall win one," cried the duke.

"That's certain!" exclaimed Scales, waving his hat with enthusiasm.

"Steady, serjeant," said the duke, smiling. "But since I forget myself, no wonder you do so. I have spoken unreservedly to you, because I know I am safe with you, and be-

cause I desire to relieve myself of some oppressive thoughts. Your fidelity, and the services you have rendered me, entitle you to be treated as a friend."

"Then, as you condescend to treat me as such," replied the serjeant, "I'll make so bold as to offer your grace a bit of advice. Don't have any more misgivings. You'll finish this war as gloriously as you've begun it, and will trample your enemies beneath your foot, as sure as you're a living man. I'll never believe that Englishmen will see the laurels snatched from the brow of their greatest commander—the Duke of Marlborough. If I thought so, I would disown my country."

"No more of this, Scales," said the duke, extending his hand to the serjeant, who pressed it fervently to his heart. "I will see you in the evening, when you shall have

the despatches. Make your preparations for departure in the meantime."

The serjeant bowed, and, brushing away a tear, left the closet.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHAT MANNER THE SERJEANT TOOK LEAVE OF HIS FRIENDS.

"A SOLDIER ought always to be ready to march at an instant's notice," thought the serjeant, as he returned to his own room, "and therefore I can't complain. Nevertheless, I should like to have had a little longer furlough. But never mind. 'Tis the fortune of war. My preparations will soon be made, and then I'll bid my friends good bye."

With this, he set to work, and in less

than an hour his scanty wardrobe, consisting of half-a-dozen shirts, an undress coat and waistcoat, and some other matters, were packed up in his chest, with military care and neatness. He then dressed himself in his full regimentals, aad proceeded to the housekeeper's room, where he found Mrs. Plumpton. Sitting down without a word, he looked fixedly at her, and heaved a deep sigh.

"Why, bless us! serjeant, what's the matter?" cried Mrs. Plumpton, with much concern. "I hope you ain't ill. Take a little ratafia?" And opening a cupboard, she produced a flask and a glass.

"Well, I don't mind if I do, Mrs. Plumpton," replied Scales. "Here's to our next merry meeting!" he added, in a tone somewhat at variance with the hilarity of the sentiment.

"I hope it wont be long first, serjeant," said the lady.

"It may be longer than you think for," replied Scales, mysteriously.

"What *do* you mean, serjeant?" cried Mrs. Plumpton, in alarm. "You ain't a-goin' to leave us soon?"

"Sorry to say I am," replied Scales. "I'm called off when I least expected it, as many a brave fellow has been before me."

"Save us! serjeant, you make me dwither all over," replied Mrs. Plumpton. "You don't mean to say that you're a-goin' to the wars!"

"The trumpet calls him to the field, and to the summons he must yield," apostrophized Scales. "He leaves the mistress of his heart—from her, indeed, 'tis hard to part; but to the battle he must go, for loud the warning trumpets blow."

Mrs. Plumpton sighed dismally.

"Amid the battle's strife," replied Scales, changing his measure, "and when the cannons roar, I'll think of thee, my life, hoping to meet once more."

"Oh! dear! dear!" cried Mrs. Plumpton. "But are you really going?"

"To-night the vessel sails, will bear away thy Scales," replied the serjeant. "Though friends elsewhere he find, he leaves his heart behind."

"Don't talk to me in this manner, I beg of you, serjeant," cried Mrs. Plumpton; "I can't bear it. It's cruel of you to trifle with one's feelings."

"I've no intention of trifling with your feelings," said Scales. "Obey I must when honour calls, though doomed to meet the cannon-balls——ha! here comes Mrs. Tipping."

"Oh! Tipping, he's a-goin' to leave us!" exclaimed Mrs. Plumpton, as the lady's-maid entered the room.

"What! the serjeant?" cried the other.

"Yes, the serjeant," responded Scales. "The soldier's is a merry life; he goes when beats the drum; and though he may not like the change,—he takes things as they come."

"And very wise in him to do so," replied Mrs. Tipping. "Well, I wouldn't be a soldier's wife for something."

"You wouldn't!" cried Scales.

"I wouldn't," she repeated. "Suppose I was your wife, for instance, what would become of me when you were away?"

"Why, you must do as the duchess does in his grace's absence," replied Scales.

"The duchess is no rule for me," rejoined Mrs. Tipping. "I shouldn't like it at all.

Suppose you were to come back without an arm, or a leg, or an eye?"

"Suppose I was, what then?" replied Scales.

"I don't think I could reconcile myself to it," replied Mrs. Tipping. "I don't like any deficiencies."

"Humph!" exclaimed Scales. "What says Mrs. Plumpton?"

"I should like you just as well if you lost both legs, or a leg and an arm," she replied.

"Well, ladies, this is no jesting matter—at least, not with me," rejoined Scales; "I am really setting out for Holland to-night. It's quite unexpected on my part, or I'd have prepared you for it. But you'll come and take a farewell dish o' tea with me in my room. I'll ask my friend Proddy to meet you. I shall expect you both at five."

Shortly after this, the serjeant repaired to Saint James's Palace, and found Proddy in the kitchen—a lofty and spacious apartment, with a vaulted roof and numerous fireplaces. The coachman was busily engaged with a cold sirloin of beef and a tankard of ale, but on learning the serjeant's intelligence, he declared it quite took away his appetite, and he laid down his knife and fork. It was then settled that they should meet again at five o'clock, and the serjeant taking his departure, Proddy withdrew to a small room contiguous to the kitchen, to smoke his pipe undisturbed, and ruminate on what he had heard. While he was thus occupied, the door opened, and in walked Bimbelot and Sauvageon.

"Good day, gentlemen," said Proddy, shaking hands with them; "how goes the world with you?"

"Passablement, mon cher cocher," replied Bimbelot, "passablement. Mais vous etes un peu triste—you look down in de mout—chopfallen—vat you call it?"

"I may well look down in the mouth, Bamby," replied Proddy, "seein' as how I'm goin' to lose my best friend."

"Vat, de sergent?" asked Sauvageon.

"Yes, he's leavin' me, and at a moment's notice too," replied Proddy.

"Ventrebleu!" exclaimed Bimbelot; "mais c'est soudain. Is Marlbrook going to de wars again?"

"If by Marlbrook you mean the Duke of Marlborough, Bamby," rejoined Proddy, with dignity, "I believe not—not just yet, at all events. The serjeant is chosen as the bearer of certain despatches to General Cadogan, which can only be conveyed by a trusty person. You understand?"

"Oui, je comprend parfaitement," answered Bimbelot, with a significant look at Sauvageon. "And when does de sergent go?"

"He sails for Holland to-night," replied Proddy.

"Vouz entendez cela," said Bimbelot to Sauvageon. "Il part ce soir pour la Hollande avec des depêches. faut l'arrêter."

"Bon," replied the corporal.

"What's that you say, Bamby?" inquired Proddy.

"I was merely expressing my regret at de great loss we shall sustain in de sergent's absence," replied Bimbelot, "c'est tout, mon brave cocher."

"I, for one, shall miss him greatly," groaned Proddy.

"And I for another!" exclaimed Bimbelot.

"And I for a third," added Sauvageon.

"Si nous pouvons mettre nos mains sur ces lettres, ce sera une bonne chance," observed Bimbelot to his friend.

"Prenez garde," replied the other; "ce drole a des soupçons."

"Eh, what?" cried Proddy; "what's droll? not the serjeant's departure, Savage-john?"

"Not in de least," replied the corporal. "C'est un bien brave homme, le sergent. I sall be excessive sorry to lose him."

"We must call to take leave of him," said Bimbelot. "At what hour does he leave Marlbro' House?"

"I don't know," replied Proddy; "but I'm going to him at five."

"Eh bien, nous passerons chez lui à sept heures—ou un peu plus tard," said Bimbelot, with a look at his friend.

"We'll do ourselves de honour to look in upon him, pour prendre congé, in de course of de evening. Oblige us by telling him so."

"I will," replied Proddy; "and I make no doubt he'll be glad to see you."

"Oh! apropos, Monsieur le cocher," cried Bimbelot, "I came to ask you a question, but what you tell me about de sergent has put it out clean of my head. Is dat Mezansene vid whom I fight de duel in de dark still in de palace!"

"What for, eh?" demanded Proddy, gruffly.

"Oh, noting very partic'lar," replied Bimbelot. "But I should like to see him."

"Then you can't — and that's flat, Bamby," rejoined the coachman. "He is in constant attendance on the prince, and can't be seen by anybody."

"Ah, Proddy, vous etes un vieux rusé,"

said Bimbelot. "You're a cunning old fox. Mais vous ne me pouvez pas tromper. You know very well it's Mr. Masham, en masquerade."

"I know nothin' of the sort," replied Proddy, still more sulkily.

"Bravo!—très bien!" cried Bimbelot, laughing. "But I shan't press you too hard. Don't be afraid of me. I wont betray him. I know what he disguise himself for—une jolie dame—Mademoiselle Abigail Hill—ha, ha! Adieu, mon cher Proddy. We sall meet again in de evening, when we call upon de sergent." And with ceremonious bows the two Frenchmen went their way.

Proddy smoked another pipe, quaffed another mug of ale, and then thinking it time to start, set out for Marlborough House. On his arrival there, he proceeded

at once to the serjeant's room, and found him seated at tea between Mrs. Plumpton and Mrs. Tipping, both of whom were in tears.

"Well, this is an affecting sight," said the coachman, pausing, as if arrested by it, near the door—"a wery affecting sight!"

"Yes, it's painful," replied the serjeant; "but having experienced so many sad partings, I'm getting used to it, like the eels. But sit down, comrade—sit down. Wont you join us?"

"Mr. Proddy never takes tea, I recollect," said Mrs. Plumpton. "I'll fetch him some ale."

And quitting the room, she returned in a few minutes with a large pewter jug, holding about three pints.

"Here's to your speedy return, serjeant," said Proddy, applying the jug to his lips,

and raising his eyes devoutly to the ceiling, as he took a long pull at the jug. "Nothing consoles a man like ale," he added. "It's balm to the bruised sperrit. We shall be quite lost without him, eh, ladies?"

"Quite lost!" they both agreed.

"The best of friends must part sometimes, my dears," replied Scales; "and we shall be all the happier when we meet again. A little absence teaches us our proper value."

"There's no occasion for absence to teach us *your* valley, serjeant, I'm sure," said Mrs. Plumpton.

"There goes Plumpton again," cried Mrs. Tipping, pettishly. "Al-*ways* taking the words out of one's mouth."

"Then you should be quick, and speak 'em first," rejoined Mrs. Plumpton.

"Oh, serjeant!" exclaimed Proddy, "I wish I was a-goin' with you. Since I've known you, I've had a monstrous longin' to enter the service, and now it comes upon me stronger than ever."

"You'd soon have enough of it," replied Scales; "not that I ever had, though; but then a man must begin young, and get inured to hardship. You can't always recruit yourself with a mug of ale and a pipe after the day's fatigue—and it's but seldom you can get a bed to lie upon. I don't think a soldier's life would suit you, Proddy. You're better as you are."

"Marchin' mightn't suit me," replied the coachman, "'cause I'm pussy and short-winded, but I should enjoy comfortable quarters in one of those old Flemish towns hugely; and as to fightin', I couldn't have too much o' that. One reason why I

should like to be a soldier is, that I should then be a favourite with the women. By-the-bye, serjeant, are the Dutch ladies handsome?"

"Very," replied the serjeant, licking his lips; "but not to compare," he added, glancing tenderly at his fair neighbours, "with our own countrywomen."

"Of course not," said Proddy; "but still they may do very well in their absence."

"Why—y-e-s," replied Scales, somewhat embarrassed, "the vrows are not without merit."

"I hope you wont fall in love with any of 'em while you're away, serjeant," said Mrs. Plumpton.

"If you come back with a Dutch wife, it will be worse than returning without a leg," said Mrs. Tipping.

The conversation here dropped. The serjeant made several efforts to renew it, but the ladies were too much depressed to be roused, and as to Proddy, he declared "he hadn't a word to throw at a dog," so he applied himself for consolation to the jug, the contents of which began to make an evident impression upon his head.

Tea was just finished, and the things removed, when Mr. Timperley entered to say that the Duke of Marlborough desired to see the serjeant. The summons, of course, was instantly obeyed, and Scales was absent nearly half an hour, during which Proddy made no remark to his companions, except to proffer a request to Mrs. Plumpton to replenish his mug, which she complied with, though with some reluctance.

On his return, the serjeant looked grave and consequential, as he usually did when fresh from the presence of his commander. But to gravity he now added an air of mystery, as if fraught with a sense of the importance of his mission. He sat down without a word, and for some moments silence prevailed, which was at length broken by Proddy.

"Well, serjeant, you've got your despatches, I suppose?" he asked.

"Safe enough," replied Scales, tapping his breast.

As he said this, the door opened, and Bimbelot and Sauvageon entered the room.

"I forgot to mention that I had told these gentlemen you were going," said Proddy, noticing that the serjeant looked surprised, and not altogether pleased.

"Oui, mon cher sergent," said Bimbelot,

" nous sommes venus pour vous dire adieu, et vous souhaiter bon voyage."

" Much obliged to you, Bamby, and to you, too, corporal," replied Scales. " but it wasn't at all necessary."

" Vous etes chargé des depêches du duc au General Cadogan, eh, sergent?" said Bimbelot.

" Why, you didn't tell 'em that, did you?" said Scales, in a low and reproachful tone to Proddy.

" I told 'em all about it," replied the coachman, whose prudence was completely overcome by the good liquor he had swallowed. " Do you think I'd fail to let 'em know how much you're in the duke's confidence? Not I! The serjeant has just left his grace," he added, " and has received the despatches from him."

" Vraiement!" exclaimed Bimbelot, with a furtive look at Sauvageon.

"Silence, fool!" cried Scales, angrily.

"De sergent well deserve de favour he enjoy," said Sauvageon. "'Tis a sure proof of merit to be trusted."

"So it is," said Bimbelot; "but if every one had his due, the sergent would hold a high rank in de army."

"He ought to be a captain," said Proddy. "Captain Scales, here's your very good health, and wishin' you may soon become a general."

"That's the general wish," said Mrs. Tipping.

"This time you've taken the words out of *my* mouth, Tipping," said Mrs. Plumpton.

"I've no desire for preferment," replied Scales, somewhat gruffly. "I'm content with my present station."

"Well, we won't intrude longer, sergent,"

said Bimbelot. "I suppose you'll be setting out immediately? Can we help you to carry your shest?"

"No, thank you," replied the serjeant, somewhat mollified by the attention; "I shall send it on before me. Proddy and I will walk through the Park together."

Bimbelot and Sauvageon exchanged glances.

"A few minutes before nine we shall fancy you crossing the park, and at nine, embarking," said the former.

"If you do so, you wont be far wrong," replied Scales.

"Adieu, then, sergent," said the two Frenchmen, bowing.

"Adieu, gentlemen," replied Scales. And after a further exchange of civilities and professions of eternal regard, Bimbelot and Sauvageon bowed themselves out.

With their disappearance, the conversation fell to the ground once more. Scales cleared his throat now and then, and tried to talk, but in vain; while Proddy quaffed his ale in silence.

This state of things endured for nearly a quarter of an hour, after which the serjeant, as if nerving himself for a great effort, got up, and putting on his hat, said, in a voice which, though he attempted to keep it firm, displayed considerable emotion —"We must part."

"Oh, don't say so, serjeant!" cried both ladies, rising likewise. "You're not going yet?"

"It's useless to postpone it longer," replied Scales; "better get the partin' over. You'll take care of my room during my absence, and clean it now and then?"

"That we will," cried both; "we'll clean

it once a week, or oftener, if you wish it."

"Don't meddle with the picters," pursued the serjeant; "for though they're not worth much, I value 'em. And I shouldn't like that piece of shot to be taken down—or that broken sword—or those gauntlets—or the spurs—or the meerschaum——"

"We wont disturb anything," cried both ladies. "You'll find all as you left it, on your return."

"If I do return," said the serjeant, gravely. "There's always an *if* where a soldier's concerned."

"Don't mention such a thing!" cried Mrs. Plumpton, bursting into tears.

"To you, Proddy, I commit the custody of my drum, certain you'll take care of it," continued Scales.

"I'll guard it as I would a treasure!"

replied the coachman. I shall fancy I hear your rat-a-tat-a-tat-a-ra-ra whenever I look at it."

"And now farewell, my dears," cried Scales, in a husky voice. "Take care of yourselves. God bless you!"

"Oh dear!—o-o-o-oh dear! I'm sure I shall never survive it!" blubbered Mrs. Plumpton, applying her apron to her eyes.

"Don't take on so, sweetheart," cried Scales, passing his arm over her shoulder, while she buried her face in his breast; "and don't you, my dear," he added, affectionately squeezing Mrs. Tipping's hand, who was sobbing with equal vehemence, and leaning against his arm for support—"if you go on thus, you'll quite unman me."

There was a pause of a few minutes, during which the serjeant gazed sadly and tenderly from one lady to the other—now

drawing Mrs. Plumpton a little closer to him with his left hand, now squeezing Mrs. Tipping rather more affectionately with the right—while the only sound heard was that of their sobs.

At length, Proddy, who had witnessed the scene in silence, and was greatly affected by it, got up, and staggering towards Mrs. Tipping, laid hold of her arm, and offering the jug of ale to her said—"Here, take a drop of this, my dear. It 'll do you good. Nothing like ale to console one in affliction —nothing like ale!"

But Mrs. Tipping would not be so comforted, and she paid no sort of attention to the coachman—so he turned to the serjeant, and offered the jug to him.

"No, I thank'ee, Proddy," said Scales. "You'll take care of these dear creaters while I'm away? I leave 'em to your care."

"You can't leave 'em in better hands," replied Proddy; "I'll be a brother to 'em. You ought to have your picter painted in that attitude, serjeant. You look for all the world like Alexander the Great betwixt Roxylany and Statiry."

An unexpected interruption was here occasioned by the entrance of a couple of stout porters, who came for the serjeant's chest, and, ashamed of being thus discovered, both ladies beat a hasty retreat.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE SERJEANT WAS WAYLAID IN THE PARK.

THE porters having set out with their load, the serjeant left the room, telling Proddy he would return presently. How long he was absent, the coachman could not tell, for, overcome by grief, and the potency of the ale, he fell fast asleep, and was awakened by a rousing slap on the shoulder. It was now quite dark, and the serjeant held a candle in his hand.

"Come, Proddy, it's time to be off, my

boy," he cried—"it's just gone half-past eight, and nine's the hour of embarkation, you know."

"I'm quite ready, serjeant," replied the coachman, with a prodigious yawn, and rubbing his eyes. "I was just a-dreaming of bein' with you in battle; and when you gave me that knock on the shoulder, I thought a cannon-ball had hit me."

"It's well it was only a dream," replied Scales, laughing. "You've had a pretty long nap. Slept off the fumes of the ale, eh?"

"Quite," replied Proddy. "I suppose you've been sayin' good bye to the women again. Took 'em separately this time, eh?"

Scales did not deny the soft impeachment, but coughed slightly, and rubbed his chin.

"You'll not forget what I said to you about 'em?" he observed.

"Oh, about takin' care of 'em," replied the coachman. "Make yourself quite easy. Any more instructions?"

"No," replied Scales. Having taken a last lingering survey of the room, he blew out the candle. "Now then, come along," he cried.

Proddy followed his leader in the dark; but they had not proceeded far, when the serjeant apparently encountered some obstacle in his path, for he came to a sudden halt. Before the coachman could inquire what was the matter, a noise of kissing was heard, intermixed by the words, "Good bye —God bless you!" pronounced in female accents, which, smothered as they were, could be distinguished as those of Mrs. Plumpton. The next moment, a female figure rushed past Proddy, and the serjeant's course was clear—at least for a short dis-

tance, for before he reached the end of the passage, he met with another obstruction. Again the sound of kissing was heard. Again pretty nearly the same words were uttered, and in the same stifled tone; but this time the voice was that of Mrs. Tipping, who sobbed audibly as she rushed past the coachman.

"Well, we shall get out in time, it's to be hoped," observed Proddy.

"All right," replied the serjeant, opening the outer door, through which they passed into the garden, and so into the park.

Arrived there, they struck off on the left, in the direction of the Cock-pit. The night was dark; and the gloom was so much increased by the shade of the trees beneath which they were walking, that they could scarcely see each other; but the serjeant, being intimately acquainted with the locality,

held on his pace briskly—so briskly indeed, that Proddy could scarcely keep up with him. All at once Scales stopped, and said, "Some one is running after us. Halloa! who goes there?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when two persons rushed forward, and seizing hold of him, endeavoured to drag him backwards by main force; but he disengaged himself by a powerful effort, and uttering a loud oath, drew his sword, shouting to Proddy to run back for the sentinel stationed near the palace.

The coachman endeavoured to obey, but had not got far when his foot caught against some impediment, and he fell with his face on the ground.

While thus prostrated, he could hear the noise of a terrible scuffle going on, intermixed with the clash of swords, and fierce

exclamations from the serjeant. Picking himself up as quickly as he could, he hurried on again, roaring lustily for help. To his great satisfaction, he was soon answered by the sentinel, whose footsteps were heard hastening towards him, while at the same time the gleam of a lantern was seen through the trees, advancing in another direction.

The next moment, the sentinel came up, and briefly informing him what had happened, Proddy set off with him to the serjeant's assistance. Both listened intently, in order to discover whether the strife was going forward; but all being now hushed, the coachman's heart died within him. Arrived, as he supposed, within a short distance of his friend, he called out,—"Where are you, serjeant?" and was answered in a faint voice, "Here!"

A watchman arriving on the instant with

his lantern, its gleam shewed the serjeant leaning against a tree, and supported by his sword. Blood was trickling from his arm, as well as from a gash on his forehead.

"You're hurt, I fear, serjeant?" inquired Proddy, in a tone of the most anxious commiseration.

"Not much," replied Scales. "I've got a thrust through the arm and a cut over the temples, and the loss of blood makes me feel faintish,—that's all. A drop of brandy would set me to rights."

"If that's all you require, serjeant," said the watchman, "I can furnish you with the remedy."

Producing a small stone bottle from his capacious pocket, he drew out the cork with his teeth, and held it to Scales's lips, who drank eagerly of its contents.

"What has become of your assailant, serjeant," asked the sentinel.

"Fled!" replied Scales—"and I think I've given 'em something to remember me by!"

"Did they try to rob you?" inquired Proddy.

"Ay, of my despatches," replied Scales; "but I foiled 'em. Here they are, safe enough," he added, raising his hand to his breast. "Tie a handkerchief round my head, Proddy, and your cravat round my arm. There—that'll do. Now that the bleeding's stanched, I shall be able to proceed."

"Why, you don't mean to embark in that state?" cried the coachman, in surprise.

"Yes, I do," replied Scales. "I've gone through an action when far worse wounded

than I am now. Lend me your arm, comrade."

"You're a brave man, I must say, serjeant," cried the sentinel. "Can I be of any further service to you?"

"No, I thank'ee, friend," replied Scales.

"I'm afraid it's useless to go in pursuit of the villains," said the watchman.

"Quite useless and quite unnecessary," replied Scales. "They've failed in the attempt, and that's sufficient. Besides, as I've said, I've given 'em each a remembrancer. Good night, sentinel."

With this he walked away firmly, though somewhat slowly, and leaning on Proddy's shoulder. The watchman attended him with his lantern as far as the Cock-pit gate, where he took his leave. The two friends then crossed over to Whitehall-stairs, and so quickly had the occurrence taken place,

that the abbey clock only struck nine as they reached the bank of the river.

"Just in time," replied Scales, glancing at the wherry which was lying at the foot of the stairs. "I always like to be punctual. Not a word of what has happened, Proddy. I don't want it to come to the duke's ear. It might make him uneasy, and all's right now."

"Do you suspect anybody?" asked the coachman.

"I do," replied Scales; "but that's neither here nor there. Farewell, comrade. Recollect what I told you about the women. Take care of 'em, and take care of yourself."

Grasping his friend's hand cordially, the serjeant marched down the stairs, and sprang into the boat, which was instantly pushed from the strand, and disappeared in the gloom.

"The sentinel spoke the truth," said Proddy, turning away with a heart brimful of emotion. "The serjeant *is* a brave fellow —a very brave fellow."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE MARQUIS DE GUISCARD HELPED TO RID MR. SAINT-JOHN OF AN INCUMBRANCE.

ABOUT the time of the serjeant's embarkation, two men were staggering along Stonecutter's Alley, a narrow passage near the north-east angle of Saint James's Park communicating with Pall Mall, supporting themselves as they proceeded against the wall, and ever and anon giving utterance to a groan or an execration.

From the difficulty and uncertainty of

the progress of these persons, it might have been supposed they were affected by liquor; but when they came within the range of a lamp, burning at the corner of the alley, it was seen from their ghastly looks, as well as from the state of their attire, that they were both severely wounded.

On reaching the lamp-post, the foremost of the two caught hold of it to prevent himself from falling, and declared with an oath that he could go no further. The conversation that ensued between him and his companion was maintained in French.

"Fiends seize him!" exclaimed the man, in accents rendered hoarse with pain. "I believe he has done for me. Who would have thought it would turn out so unluckily! Two to one, we ought to have been more than a match for him; but engaging with that man is like fighting with the devil—

one is sure to have the worst of it. He has an arm of iron."

"I wouldn't have proposed the job," groaned the other in reply, "but I thought we could have come upon him unawares. He boasts that he is never taken by surprise, and after this, I shall credit the assertion."

"If he had not a scull as thick as a block of marble, and as hard, I should have cut him down," rejoined the first speaker.

"And if he were made of ordinary stuff he must have dropped after the thrust I dealt him," returned the other. "My sword passed right through his body."

"Bah! your blade must have glanced against his ribs, or gone through his arm, Bimbelot," observed the first speaker. "Reserve the description of your feats for the marquis. I know what really *did* happen.

I know he has given me enough, and more than I am likely to get over. Go on, and leave me. I may as well die here as elsewhere."

"Don't think of dying, corporal," replied Bimbelot; "that would indeed be making the worst of a bad business. You're badly hurt, I dare say—and so am I; but I hope not mortally. If we can but reach the Unicorn over the way, where the marquis is waiting for us, we shall get our wounds dressed, and then all danger will be over. Come, make an effort. You'll bleed to death if you stay there. I would lend you a helping hand, but my arm is useless."

"It's over with me entirely, comrade," groaned Sauvageon. "This precious scheme was all of your contriving, and you see how it has turned out."

"We both ran equal risk," replied Bim-

belot, "and the reward was to be equally divided."

"Reward!" echoed Sauvageon, in bitter derision. "What will the marquis say when we go back empty-handed? We shall get curses from him instead of gold."

"No we shan't," replied Bimbelot; "he *must* pay us, or we'll peach."

"The shame of defeat galls me more than my wounds," cried Sauvageon, writhing with anguish. "Would I could have one more blow at the caitiff."

"Don't strike at me, corporal," exclaimed Bimbelot, moving away from him. "I'm not the serjeant. Make an effort, I say, or you'll fall into the hands of the watch. I hear them coming this way."

So saying, he crept off, and Sauvageon, alarmed by the noise of approaching footsteps, staggered after him across the street.

A few steps further brought them to the Unicorn—a small inn at the corner of the Haymarket. Guiscard was standing at the door, and without a word led them to a chamber on the right of the passage, on entering which the sight of their blood-stained apparel made him start.

"What the devil is the meaning of this?" he cried. "You have not failed in your enterprise? It was too well planned, and too easy of execution for that. Give me the dispatches quickly, and you shall have that which will prove a balsam for your wounds, were they deeper and more desperate than they seem."

"You had better send a surgeon to us, without further questioning, monseigneur," rejoined Bimbelot, sullenly, "unless you wish us to die at your feet."

"You *shall* die, if you have disappointed

me, villain!" cried the marquis, in a terrible tone. "Give me the despatches, or ——"

And he drew his sword.

"Nay, if this is the way we're to be served, it's time to take care of ourselves," rejoined Bimbelot, moving towards the door.

His passage was barred by the marquis. Bimbelot would have cried out, but he was stopped by Sauvageon.

"This is poor usage to men who have risked their lives for you, monseigneur,' said the latter; "if we have failed, it has not been our fault. That we have done our best you may be sure, from the condition we are in."

"I was wrong to blame you, my poor fellow," replied Guiscard, sheathing his sword; "but it is cursedly provoking to be robbed of a prey when it seemed actually

within one's grasp. Why, the fate of this kingdom hung upon those despatches. With them, the success of the French expedition would have been decided. All my preparations were made for their speedy transmission to France. A mounted courier awaits my orders in the next street, prepared to ride as fast as post-horses could carry him to Deal, where a small vessel in my pay would bear whatever he might bring, safely and swiftly, to Dunkirk. This accomplished, I would have made both your fortunes."

"We did our best to accomplish it, monseigneur," replied Bimbelot. "But that serjeant is the very devil."

"Ay, the luck has been against us," added Sauvageon; "but if we get over it, we'll hope to be more fortunate next time."

"You will never have such another

chance," cried the marquis, sharply. "These things don't occur twice. Would I had undertaken it myself!"

"If you had, monseigneur, without disparagement to your skill and courage, I don't think you would have been more successful than we have been," replied Sauvageon. "I never encountered a man like the serjeant. We hit him pretty sharply, but he contrived to walk off, with the queen's coachman, Proddy, and I have no doubt embarked with the despatches."

"Hell sink him!" cried Guiscard, savagely.

"I hope we shan't lose our reward, monseigneur?" said Bimbelot. "Consider what we've gone through."

"It was a game of chance, like any other, and having lost it, you ought to abide by the consequences," replied Guis-

card. "However, as you've suffered so much, you shall have the hundred pounds I promised you."

"You wont repent your generosity, monseigneur," said Sauvageon.

The marquis then left the room, but returned shortly afterwards with a surgeon and his assistant, to whom he had accounted for the disaster by stating that the two men had been set upon and wounded by the Mohocks—a circumstance of far too common occurrence in those times of nocturnal riot, to occasion any surprise, or awaken suspicion. Having seen their wounds dressed, and ascertained from the surgeon that no danger was to be apprehended, he ordered his followers to be put to bed, and again quitted the house.

To distract his thoughts, which were by no means of an agreeable nature, he hurried

to Little Man's Coffee-house, and joining the faro table, soon lost a considerable sum. He was about to double his stakes, when a friendly arm was laid upon his shoulder, and turning, he perceived Saint-John.

"Come away," cried the latter; "I want to have a word with you. You're not in luck to-night; and if you go on, you'll repent it."

Guiscard would have resisted, but the other succeeded in dragging him away.

"Come and sup with me," said Saint-John, as they quitted the coffee-house. "I am about to leave town to-morrow."

"Leave town!—and at this juncture, when such great events are on the eve of occurring!" exclaimed Guiscard. "Now, if ever, you ought to be on the scene of action."

"I have done with politics and courts,

and will try the sweets of retirement," replied Saint-John.

"Is ambition extinct within your breast?" cried Guiscard. "I cannot believe it. If the sovereignty of the realm should be changed by this threatened invasion, you may regret hereafter that you have allowed the opportunity to pass of pushing your fortune to the uttermost."

"I should have more reason for regret if I took any part in the struggle," cried Saint-John. "But a truce to politics."

"By way of changing the subject, then," replied Guiscard, "I have remarked a very pretty woman in your coach of late, and from the hasty glimpse I caught of her features, they seem familiar to me. Who is she?"

"An old acquaintance of yours," replied

Saint-John, laughing. "Don't you remember Angelica Hyde?"

"What! the country parson's daughter?" cried Guiscard. "And so, she has taken up her abode with you, eh?"

"It fell out thus," replied Saint-John. "Angelica preferred town life so much to a dull existence in the country, that when the old people returned into Essex, she could not be persuaded to accompany them. And as she threw herself upon my compassion, why — i'faith — I was obliged to receive her."

"No great hardship, I imagine," replied Guiscard, laughing. "She's devilish pretty."

"And devilish extravagant," rejoined Saint-John. "She has almost ruined me in dress and trinkets. Whatever she fancies, she buys, no matter at what cost."

"And is she to be the companion of your solitude?" asked the marquis.

"Deuce knows," replied Saint-John; "I haven't told her of my intention of retiring yet."

"You seem indifferent enough about the matter, at all events," said the marquis, laughing.

"Why, to say truth, I have discovered that she cares very little about me," said Saint-John; "and therefore, though I *have* committed the folly of loving a woman under such circumstances, I shan't do so in the present instance."

"A wise resolve," replied Guiscard. "She will sup with us, I suppose?"

"Oh, certainly!" replied Saint-John.

And they continued chatting in the same strain till they reached their destination.

On entering the drawing-room, they found

only two persons within it, and these were Prior and Angelica, who were playing picquet, but stopped their game on the arrival of the new comers.

Prepared for some change in Angelica, Guiscard was nevertheless struck with astonishment at the extraordinary alteration that had occurred in her. In the space of a few weeks, the country girl had been transformed into the perfect town lady. There was no end to her finery. Her dress consisted of a blue and gold Atlas gown, with a wrought petticoat edged with gold; shoes laced with silver; lace cap, and lappets; while her fingers glittered with costly rings, and pearls and other precious stones adorned her neck. Her cheeks were covered with patches, and her beautiful locks filled with powder. She looked handsomer than before, but bolder and freer in her de-

portment; talked loudly; and laughed boisterously and incessantly, probably to display her pearly teeth.

When Guiscard was presented to her by Saint-John, she extended her hand to him, and cried, in a tone of easy familiarity—

"Glad to see ye, marquis. How are ye? Come to sup with us—eh? Been to ridotto, or the masquerade? Saint-John wouldn't take me to either; and of all things I dote on a masquerade. It's so purely funny—one hears and sees so many diverting things—and can do just what one likes. Come and sit by me. Find me changed since we first met in the secretary's ante-room, eh?"

"I then thought you could not be improved," replied Guiscard, bowing; "but I now perceive my error."

"Prettily turned, indeed!" she cried,

with a laugh. "I like to extort a compliment. But I *am* improved,—at least, if my glass may be trusted. Hope you admire my dress? It's the ditto of the Duchess of Marlborough's, and was made for me by her grace's own milliner, Madame Alamode; so it must be the thing, you know."

"It's perfect," replied Guiscard. "No dress ever became the duchess half so much —but then, your figure——"

"Far surpasses her grace's!" interrupted Angelica, with another boisterous laugh. "I am quite aware of that, marquis."

"There's no comparison between you," said Guiscard. "We have no such beauty as you at court."

"Always excepting Abigail Hill!" rejoined Angelica, maliciously.

"Not even excepting her!" said Guiscard.

"You really think so?" rejoined Angelica, much pleased.

"On my veracity," affirmed the marquis, laying his hand upon his heart.

"You hear the pretty things the marquis is saying to me, Saint-John," she cried. "Aint you jealous?"

"I should be, if I were not secure of your attachment," he replied, drily. "But, see, supper is ready. Marquis, be so good as to give your arm to Angelica."

Guiscard readily complied, and the folding-doors being thrown open, they proceeded to the adjoining room, where an exquisite repast awaited them, to which ample justice was done by all parties.

The champagne was pushed briskly round, and with every fresh glass he swallowed, the marquis discovered new charms in Angelica, who, on her part, did not

appear insensible to his admiration. A bowl of mulled Burgundy closed the feast, and this discussed, the party returned to the drawing-room, where Guiscard sat down to picquet with Angelica, while Saint-John and Prior conversed apart.

"How monstrous dull you'll find the country after the gay life you've been leading," observed Guiscard, in a low tone to his partner.

"Find the country dull!" repeated Angelica, listlessly. "What do you mean, marquis?"

"Oh, I forgot!" said Guiscard. "Saint-John hasn't told you of his intention of——"

"His intention of what?" interrupted Angelica, becoming suddenly animated. "Surely he doesn't think of going into the country?"

"'Faith, I don't know," rejoined Guiscard. "Excessively stupid in me to allude to the subject! It's your play, madam."

"I insist upon having a direct answer, marquis!" said the lady.

"Before I comply," he rejoined, "tell me one thing. If Saint-John goes, will you accompany him?"

"Question for question," she rejoined, regarding him fixedly. "Your motive for asking, marquis?"

"My motive is this," he replied, with a passionate glance. "If you prefer staying in town, my house is at your service."

"And you would have me believe you are in love with me?" said Angelica, smiling.

"I adore you!" he answered.

"My heart flutters so that I can play no more," she cried, throwing down the

cards, and rising. "Mr. Saint-John, may I ask if you have any idea of going out of town to-morrow?"

"Going out of town?" he replied, glancing at the marquis. "Yes, I think I have."

"Do you mean to remain long in the country?"

"Two or three years," he answered, carelessly. "Just as my inclination holds out."

"Two or three years!" almost screamed Angelica. "And you have settled all this without deigning to consult me?"

"I meant to tell you at breakfast, my dear," said Saint-John, with a comical expression of countenance. "You would have had sufficient time for preparation."

"I should *not* have sufficient time, sir,"

she retorted; "and, to be plain with you, I wont go!"

"As you please, my dear," replied Saint-John, coolly; "your staying behind will make no difference in my plans."

"No difference!" she exclaimed—"what am I to do for three years? Why, you told me you couldn't live a day without me. Oh, you deceitful wretch!"

"Go, or stay, whichever you prefer, my love," replied Saint-John. "The choice rests entirely with yourself."

Angelica seemed to hesitate between a torrent of indignation and a fit of hysterics. At last, she flung herself violently upon a sofa. Guiscard would fain have offered her assistance, but she pushed him aside.

After a few moments, she arose, and in a tone of forced composure, said—"Will you

do me the favour to order my chair, Mr. Saint-John?"

"Certainly, my love, — by all means," he replied, ringing the bell.

And on the appearance of the servant, he gave the necessary directions.

"You were good enough to place your house at my disposal just now, marquis," said Angelica. "I accept the offer."

"Enchanted!" replied Guiscard, though with some confusion. "I hope Saint-John——"

"Oh! no apologies, marquis," replied the other. "You are doing me an inexpressible favour."

"Adieu, Mr. Saint-John," said Angelica, spitefully. "I hope you will amuse yourself in the country."

"Adieu, ma petite," he replied; "I trust to find you handsomer than ever on my

return. I give you a new lover for each month of my absence."

At this moment, the chair was announced, and Guiscard, taking Angelica's hand, led her out of the room.

"I congratulate you, Saint-John, in getting rid of a plaguy incumbrance," cried Prior, laughing.

"The marquis has saddled himself with a nice burthen," replied the other. "His ruin was certain without her assistance, but she will accelerate it."

"Well, I must begone, too," said Prior. "I cannot very well picture you in retirement. But we shall have you back when Harley is again in power."

"Pshaw!" cried Saint-John—"but for Harley, I might remain. He is in my way. If ever I do re-appear——but no matter. Farewell."

As Prior left the room, after shaking hands heartily with his friend, he said to himself—"I shall live to see a terrible conflict yet between Saint-John and Harley."

CHAPTER VII.

SHEWING HOW THE DISINTERESTEDNESS OF MASHAM'S AFFECTION FOR ABIGAIL WAS PROVED.

On the morning after Masham's successful mystification of the duchess, as the queen and the prince were seated together in the library of the palace, Anne remarked to her consort — "Well, prince, notwithstanding all you say about your equerry's devoted attachment to Abigail, I am not at all satisfied that he does not pay court to her as much from interested motives as from a genuine feeling of regard."

Young Masham protecting Abigail Hill from the Marquis de Guiscard.

LONDON: JOHN MORTIMER, ADELAIDE STREET, 1844.

"Your majesty does him great injustice by the supposition," replied the prince.

"Nay, if he seeks his own advancement, he only imitates the example of most of those who crowd my court," replied Anne. "I do not blame him for it. But I should be sorry to see her thrown away upon a place-hunter."

"I wish the sincerity of his affection could be tested," said the prince.

"The experiment can easily be made on the first occasion they meet together in my presence," replied the queen.

"Masham can instantly attend your majesty," said the prince; "for he is in my apartments."

An usher was then directed to summon him and Abigail, and the man had scarcely departed upon his mission, when the door opened, and Harley entered. He was re-

ceived with great kindness by the royal pair, and Anne said to him—"I hope you are come to remind me of my promise, Mr. Harley, to compensate you, so far as I am able, for your late defeat."

"I have not forgotten your promise, gracious madam," replied Harley; "and will remind you at a fitting time. But I have just heard that Masham has returned."

"It is true," replied the queen. "You will see him in a moment or two. I have sent for him, and also for your cousin Abigail, who is in great disgrace."

"In disgrace!" echoed Harley. "I am concerned to hear it. But your majesty is jesting," he added, reassured by the expression of the queen's countenance.

At this juncture, the door again opened, and gave admission to the Duchess of Marlborough.

"Always when least desired," muttered the queen, frowning.

"Her grace has a talent for coming at wrong seasons," observed Harley, in a whisper.

"I am come to tell your majesty," said the duchess, speaking with great precipitancy, and almost neglecting the customary obeisance, "that we were both deceived yesterday. It *was* Mr. Masham whom I met, and he has been for some time in disguise in the palace. I have found it all out by means of——"

"Your grace's spies," supplied Harley.

"No matter how," rejoined the duchess. "It *is* so; and I can prove it to your majesty."

"It is needless," replied the queen, coldly, "I am already aware of it."

"Then I trust your majesty will punish

his presumption as it deserves," replied the duchess. "Oh, he is here!" she added, as the usher announced the offender.

"So, Mr. Masham," she continued, "you played us a daring and unhandsome trick yesterday. Setting aside all else, was it becoming a gentleman to deceive his grace of Marlborough in the way you did, and to make him an unwitting instrument in your scheme?"

"I have explained the matter fully to his grace," replied Masham, "and have obtained his pardon for the liberty I took with him. The duke laughed heartily at my explanation, shook hands with me, and said he hoped the queen would entertain no greater resentment against me than he did."

"I can answer for the truth of this," said the prince, "for the explanation occurred in my apartments this morning."

"The duke's good-nature borders upon weakness!" cried the duchess, angrily.

"Your grace keeps the balance even, and makes up his deficiency, in the opposite quality," observed Harley.

"A shrewd retort, Mr. Ex-Secretary," rejoined the duchess; "I am glad you have taken to making epigrams. It will be pleasant and fitting employment for you."

At this moment, Abigail entered, and looked round with uneasiness.

"If your majesty allows Mr. Masham to escape with impunity, it will bring scandal on your court," said the duchess, in a whisper to the queen.

"Your grace will be satisfied with the punishment I shall inflict on him," replied Anne. "Abigail," she continued, in a voice of affected severity, "I have sent for you to let you know, that after the decep-

tion practised on your part, and on that of Mr. Masham, it will be impossible to retain you longer in my service. You are therefore dismissed."

"Your majesty!" exclaimed Harley.

"Not a word, sir!" cried the queen, peremptorily—"not a word! You are dismissed, I say, Abigail—and you forfeit all my favour. I have ordered Mr. Masham to be present at your disgrace, that, inasmuch as he is the principal cause of it, he may witness the result of his folly and disobedience."

"There is something beneath the surface here," thought Harley. "I shall watch how the game goes, and come in when I find it necessary."

"I applaud your majesty's decision," cried the duchess, unable to conceal her satisfaction. "It is a just sentence. We shall see

whether the discarded attendant possesses as much attraction in her lover's eyes as the queen's favourite!"

"Her grace has asked the precise question I desired to have put," observed the queen, in an undertone, to the prince.

The duchess saw the look, and instantly perceiving her error, caught hold of Masham's arm as he was about to speak, and said, in a low, hurried tone—

"Take your cue from me, or you are ruined for ever. Whatever you may feel, do not profess an interest in Abigail now."

"What says Mr. Masham?" cried the queen. "Is he content with the discarded favourite?"

"Madam, I—" hesitated Masham.

"'Sdeath! can you not speak?" cried the prince.

"Don't be guided by the duchess, or you will ruin yourself and Abigail beyond redemption," said Harley, in a whisper to him. "Speak out boldly."

Thus exhorted, Masham threw himself at the queen's feet.

"Do not condemn Abigail for my fault, I beseech you, madam," he cried. "Visit your displeasure on my head as severely as you please, but not on hers! She is not to blame—indeed she is not! I will consent to retire into perpetual exile, never to behold her again, which will be worse to me than death, if you will extend forgiveness to her!"

"Love-sick fool!" exclaimed the duchess.

"Bravo! bravissimo!" exclaimed the prince, clapping his hands joyfully. "Didn't I say so?—didn't I tell your majesty it was

disinterested affection on his part. Are you satisfied now?"

"Perfectly," replied the queen. "Arise, sir, you have gained your suit. Abigail is forgiven."

"Oh, your majesty!" cried Abigail, kneeling and pressing the hand of her royal mistress to her lips.

"I will now let you know that your dismissal was merely a pretence," said the queen. "You deceived me, and I therefore considered myself entitled to deceive you. Trick for trick is only fair play."

"I have been rightly served, gracious madam," replied Abigail, "and I thank you for your leniency."

"Now comes my turn," said Harley. "I shall take this opportunity to remind your majesty of your promise. The favour

I ask is a remission of Mr. Masham's sentence, and his restoration to your favour."

"It is granted," replied the queen.

"Lest this silly scene should proceed further, I announce to your majesty, that I forbid any union between Mr. Masham and Abigail," said the duchess, "and you will do well, therefore, to reflect, before you give a promise to that effect."

"On what plea do you forbid the union?" demanded Anne, surprised.

"Your majesty shall know anon," replied the duchess. "My explanation must be for your private ear."

"What is the meaning of this, cousin?" asked Harley, in a low tone, of Abigail.

"Oh! nothing—nothing," she replied, in a confident tone; but she nevertheless turned excessively pale.

"You think to bring about this marriage,"

said the duchess, in a low tone, to Harley, as she passed him; "but it will never take place!"

"It *will* take place, as surely as your grace's downfal, of which it will be the precursor," he replied, in the same tone.

END OF VOL. II.

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